

CHOICE

Independent information for smart consumers

Tests

FRIDGES

STROLLERS

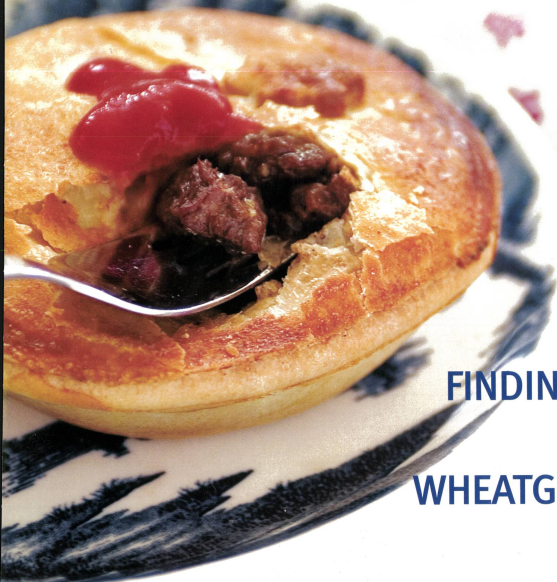
WHEELED SUITCASES

SANDWICH PRESSES

DVD/HARD DISC RECORDERS

MEAT PIES

But how much meat?



FINDING A NANNY

Tips and traps

WHEATGRASS JUICE

Fad vs facts

COMING SOON ...

Irons

Our team of ironers picked out the models that make the job easier.



Pasta sauces

Are they up to gourmet standards?



Secateurs

The most expensive didn't cut the best.



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Good news stories

I must admit to having been a bit dubious about sandwich presses (known to some as panini presses). I thought they might be fine for a cheese toasty, but smoked salmon focaccias where the salmon's ended up cooked have featured too often in my café experiences for me to expect a home-cooked version to be any better.

So I was sceptical when our tester offered to cook the team smoked salmon and cream cheese panini while we discussed the test results. I needn't have been — the presses produced crispy panini with nicely warmed but uncooked salmon, without melting the cream cheese. They're just as handy for any number of other yummy gourmet sandwiches — the article on page 27 has some recipe suggestions. I might even go so far as to buy one.

The next good news story in this issue came from our investigation into the nanny 'industry'. We sent a young woman with no nanny experience or qualifications to several nanny agencies. She asked for a job as a nanny — and despite some recent media scare stories, not one agency would even consider her.

The downside of this story is the sheer frustration that can face someone trying to find a good nanny. Our volunteer contacted 25 agencies we'd found in the *Yellow Pages*. Of those, only 10 called her back — the others either weren't nanny agencies (despite their ads making them appear to be), were no longer in business, or just didn't bother to reply.

Overall, though, it's nice to be able to bring you some good news for a change.



Jane Mackenzie
Editor

www.CHOICEextra.com.au



This is a free website for CHOICE magazine subscribers. It's an index of CHOICE articles going back to Jan/Feb 2002, with links to PDFs of many of them so you can read them immediately, without having to go and find your issue of CHOICE.

To use this website you need to log in with your subscriber number, which is the number directly above your name on the mailing label that comes with the magazine.

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CHOICE PRICE RISE

Due to increasing costs, the price of a CHOICE subscription is going up. The new prices, effective from the August 2006 issue, will be:

- Personal subscribers: quarterly \$18.50, one year \$74, two years \$137.
- Institution/company: one year \$118, two years \$225.
- CHOICE and CHOICE Online: quarterly \$29.
- Upgrade to CHOICE plus CHOICE Online if you're already a CHOICE subscriber: \$10.50/qtr.
- If you've subscribed within the last year, the price you pay will be held constant for your first year.

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Unfortunately, in many brands there's really not a lot of meat.

Photo: Gene Ross

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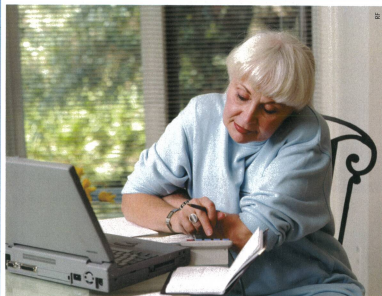
Three-wheelers may be all the rage, but there's still a place for the four-wheel, fully reclining stroller.

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Your suitcase can make or break a holiday — find out which ones won't break, fall over or bite your ankles.

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Don't rush into a reverse mortgage

With a reverse mortgage you borrow money against the current value of your home and pay it back — including interest and fees — when you sell (or your estate pays it back after your death). They're targeted at people over 60 who can use them, for example, to pay for renovations or provide more money to live on. They're an increasingly popular product with both older consumers and financial institutions and there are lots of reverse mortgage products to choose from.

However, CHOICE has uncovered some alarming contract traps and gaps in consumer protection. You need to check the contract very carefully before you sign up. Problems include:

- Wide-ranging default clauses. When you're in default the lender can require immediate repayment of the whole loan — and you can be in default for minor contract breaches such as not paying rates on time or forgetting to fill out an annual declaration.
- Gaps in the 'no negative equity guarantee', under which the lender covers any shortfall if your loan balance exceeds the proceeds of the sale of your home. For example, in many cases it doesn't apply if you're in default.

We'll be urging state governments to introduce uniform reverse mortgage laws in order to force the industry to standardise its contracts and clear up these problems. For a longer article go to www.choice.com.au/campaigns.

Meanwhile if you're considering a reverse mortgage get independent legal advice. Make sure a thorough check of the contract is done and ask your adviser to check carefully:

- Could you be in default by breaking any of the many, often trivial, contract clauses?
- Does the 'no negative equity guarantee' apply if you're in default?
- What are the conditions if you want to sell the home?
- Are the lender and anyone else you're dealing with (such as a mortgage broker and/or a company managing the mortgage) members of an approved dispute resolution scheme? To check phone 1300 780 808.

It's also a good idea to get financial advice to make sure a reverse mortgage really suits your circumstances and that your pension entitlements won't be adversely affected.

Stroller safety on railway stations

RailCorp in NSW has launched an awareness campaign to promote stroller and pram safety on trains and station platforms, after an alarming 47 reported incidents on the Sydney CityRail network over the past two years.

Incidents have involved children falling out of strollers or prams while the carer descended stairs, strollers being blown around by gusts of wind from passing trains, and most disturbingly, strollers rolling off station platforms onto the tracks.

So far there have been few serious injuries resulting from these accidents, but the potential for tragedy is clear. Most of the incidents arose from adults not holding onto the stroller — in some cases only letting go for a few moments — or not applying the brakes. Three-wheeled strollers appear particularly prone to rolling away, because the wheels tend to roll more freely and the front wheel can pivot.

Most of the incidents happened on station platforms that slope down towards the edge. RailCorp has begun a platform-levelling program to improve platform gradients, and plans to introduce 'pram-safe' zones on station platforms. Manufacturers have been asked to look at mechanical improvements to strollers, such as automatic braking devices, to help address the problem.

Safety tips for using a pram or stroller at stations and on trains:

- Keep a firm hold.
- Put the brakes on when stopped.
- Park it parallel to the tracks.
- Use lifts where possible. If you have to use the stairs, take your baby out of the stroller first.
- Travel in a carriage near the guard, so they can make sure you've safely boarded or alighted.
- Ask railway staff or other passengers for help if you need it.



Keeping your computer secure

Computer security's no longer just a matter of running antivirus software. These days you also need a firewall and anti-spyware protection, and a spam filter can help in the fight against viruses, phishing (ID theft) scams and other dubious files that arrive by email. That's where all-in-one security programs come in. *Computer CHOICE* recently tested the available software to find out which provided the best protection and was easy to use. The top performer was:

■ ZONEALARM Internet Security Suite 6, \$99.

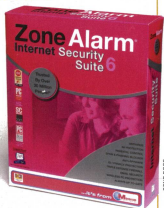
An all-in-one program makes sense now that malicious software's no longer easily classified as spyware, virus or trojan, but most products have a weak point — it's most commonly the anti-spam or anti-spyware software. *ZONEALARM* provided very good security across all categories.

All-in-one packages generally cost around \$100. The cost usually covers 12 months of subscriptions and product updates, but you also have to factor in the cost of subscription after the initial period ends, and you may have to pay extra for phone support and assistance. If your budget's limited you can use free products to protect you from most nasties. Once you have a security package:

- Scan your system with it for spyware, worms and viruses.
- Switch on any components of the suite that aren't on by default.
- Train your spam filter by marking email messages as junk or legitimate.
- Scan for spyware at least once a month.
- Scan for viruses once a week.
- Update your security software regularly.
- Keep your operating system up to date by installing security updates.

There's no all-in-one software package for Macs but the built-in Mac OS X firewall is a must. You should also consider anti-spyware and antivirus software.

The full report on security software is available in the March/April 2006 issue of *Computer CHOICE*. To subscribe call 1800 069 552 toll-free or go to www.choice.com.au/magazines.



GENE ROSS

CORRECTION

CAR TYRES

CHOICE, March 2006

■ In *Tricky tyres*, page 23, we said one-directional tyres are also called asymmetrical. This isn't correct. One-directional tyres need to be fitted so their tread pattern faces a particular way, usually indicated by an arrow on the sidewall. Asymmetrical tyres need to be fitted so that a particular side (marked on the sidewall) faces outwards.

■ In *How to read a tyre*, page 24, we said the '205' in the tested size 205/65R15 describes the width of the tread area. In fact it's the 'section width': the distance between the exterior sidewalls, which is slightly bigger than the tread width. The aspect ratio (the '65' in the above example) is the ratio between the tyre's height and the section width.

CORDLESS PHONES

CHOICE, Jan/Feb 2006

On page 28 we said, "TELSTRA has a service that provides a free home phone with a telecoil for people who have hearing difficulties." In fact the service isn't free — you'll be charged the same annual rental fee as you would for a standard rental telephone handset.

To find out more about applying for equipment from TELSTRA's Disability Enquiry Hotline, phone 1800 068 424 (voice), 1800 808 981 (TTY [teletypewriter]) or email disability@online.telstra.com.au.

Test of bike lights

If you ride your bicycle at night, you must have lights. They're required in all states, by law, for riding at night and in hazardous low-visibility weather conditions. You must have a white light at the front, a red light at the rear, and a rear red reflector. The lights can be steady or flashing, but must be visible for at least 200 m from the front and rear. Ideally they should also be visible for 50 m from the side.

But go into any large bike shop and you'll be dazzled by the array of lights available. Which ones should you choose?

Bicycle Victoria recently conducted a test

of bike lights. A panel of 11 people representing various interests within the cycling community judged 10 front lights and 10 rear lights at dusk for direct visibility at 200 m and side visibility at 50 m. Bicycle Victoria recommends the following models.

FRONT LIGHTS

- Best all-round visibility and Best Buy: **BIKE ESSENTIALS 4 LED**. Price (rrp): \$25.
- Best front visibility: **S-SUN SS-L 130W**, \$59.

REAR LIGHTS

- Best all-round visibility and Best Buy: **SMART RL307 7 LED**, \$25.



GENE ROSS

- Best rear visibility: **CATEYE TL-LD600**, \$40, and **S-SUN EagleFly 310RL**, \$39.

More information on bike lights can be found in the April/May issue of *Bicycle Victoria's* magazine *Ride On*, and at www.bv.com.au.

CAN YOU HELP?

NURSING HOMES

If you've had to choose a nursing home for an elderly relative in recent years, chances are you've learned a lot in the process and have a wealth of information others in the same situation could benefit from.

For an upcoming article on what to look for in a nursing home we're looking for people who are willing to share their experiences with other CHOICE readers. Please write to **Nursing homes** at CHOICE, 57 Carrington Road, Marrickville 2204, or email nursinghomes@choice.com.au by 14 May 2006. Thank you for your help.

LASER EYE SURGERY

Are you over the moon with elation because laser eye surgery has freed you from glasses and contact lenses? Or did you decide against it because of the risks and side effects, or the costs involved?

We'd like to hear from people who've had, or considered, laser eye surgery recently. What type of surgery did you have, and for which vision problem? Where did you have it done? Did your health fund cover any of the costs? How satisfied were you with the results? If you considered it but didn't go through with it, why not?

If you want to share your experiences with other CHOICE readers, please write to **Laser eye surgery** at CHOICE, 57 Carrington Road, Marrickville 2204, or email lasereyesurgery@choice.com.au by 2 June 2006. Thank you for your help.

NO PIN REQUIRED

The UK recently brought in a chip-and-PIN system for credit cards in an effort to reduce fraud. This means cardholders must enter a PIN when using their credit cards rather than just signing. They'll also have to enter a PIN when using their debit cards, similar to our EFTPOS system. Previously UK cardholders were able to just sign for purchases when using these cards too.

But don't worry if you're planning a trip to the UK and don't have a credit card PIN. Overseas cardholders who don't use a credit card PIN in their home country won't have to in the UK either. You'll just have to sign as usual.

If you have trouble with a retailer accepting your credit card without a PIN, ask them to insert your card into the terminal, which should then read your card and instruct the retailer to ask for your signature.

If your debit card has a Maestro logo you'll still be able to use it in the UK to make purchases at shops that also have the Maestro logo. To do this you'll need to enter your regular PIN as you do when using EFTPOS here.

For more information go to www.chipandpin.co.uk.



Kids, TV and obesity risk factors

Here's something we might not hear about on the news on commercial TV. Research published in the *Medical Journal of Australia* has confirmed several overseas studies and linked the amount of TV a child watches with behaviour that puts them at risk of obesity.

The April issue of CHOICE *Health Reader* reports that researchers from Deakin University in Melbourne looked at 1560 primary school children over a year. Parents were asked to fill in questionnaires about how much daily TV the kids watched, what they ate and how often they participated in organised physical activities.

The intensity level of each kid's physical activity was monitored and the researchers also measured the height and weight and calculated the body mass index (BMI) of each child. The age and sex of the child, the parents' level of education and other variables were also taken into account.

They found that kids who watched TV for more than two hours a day were significantly more likely to have one or more serves per day of high-energy drinks and one or more serves a day of savoury snacks; and they were less likely to have two or more serves a day of fruit and to participate in any organised physical activities.

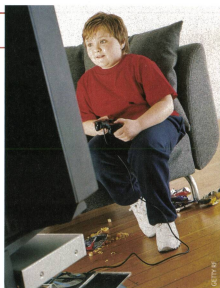
What's the link between TV and behaviour that encourages obesity? It's probably because while children are watching TV, they're not exercising and they're being bombarded by fast-food advertising, so they're more likely to ask for (and get) fast food in their diet, which more often than not is fatty and sugary – and, to complete the circle, they're not doing the exercise to burn it off. Once established, obesity is hard to treat, so prevention is key and switching off the TV is a good start.

Also in April *Health Reader*:

■ A Dutch study suggests that a diet rich in antioxidants will reduce the risk of developing macular degeneration (MD), the most common cause of irreversible blindness in people over 50 in Australia. People who had a high intake of all four of the antioxidants vitamin E, zinc, beta carotene and vitamin C in their diets reduced the risk of MD by 35%.

■ A recently published study has added weight to the theory that regular activity helps preserve brain function. When the exercise habits over six years of 1700 people over 65 were analysed, those who exercised at least three times a week were found to have a 38% lower risk of developing dementia. A session of exercise counted as 15 minutes of walking, swimming, hiking, aerobics, weight training or stretching.

If you'd like to subscribe to CHOICE *Health Reader*, call 1800 069 552 toll-free, or go to www.choice.com.au/magazines.



yourletters

PHONES FOR HEARING-IMPAIRED PEOPLE

I would like to thank you for pointing out that the cordless phones tested in your *Almost mobile* article (CHOICE, Jan/Feb 2006) didn't contain telecoils. I'm sure you've saved potential customers with a hearing impairment from what can be a frustrating experience.

I'm hearing-impaired and last year my husband and I decided to purchase a cordless phone. Before heading off to the store we did some research and found a particular model claimed to be 'hearing aid compatible'.

We thought we'd found a bargain as this model was on sale and was available in a set of two handsets. Unfortunately it was not compatible at all and was promptly returned for a refund.

However, our search for a phone had a happy ending. After further research we found the **UNIDEN SSE15**, which has been specifically designed for the hard of hearing. This phone has a telecoil and an extra-loud ringer as well as a visual alert on both the base and handset.

The only downside is that it doesn't have multi-handset capabilities and availability seems to be limited, as we could only locate it in two online stores.

It's rather disappointing with today's technology that a telecoil



hasn't become a standard feature in all phones.

Melissa Harvy

UNIDEN says it's currently working on a model with a telecoil and multi-handset capabilities and hopes it'll be available within the next 12 months.

SLOW REDIAL

I read your cordless phone report with interest to see if you had marked down the **UNIDEN DSS 2415** for the thing that drove me batty about it, but you hadn't picked up on it.

I think every phone needs a simple redial button to call the last number dialled, but no such luck on this **UNIDEN**. By the time you've gone into the menu, scrolled down, found it and pressed it, it's just as fast to redial the number yourself.

Name and address withheld

UNIDEN says the phone has been designed so that you can redial the last three numbers dialled, but to do this you need to access the numbers via a menu screen. It says while one redial button would be simpler it has found many people like having a choice of three recently dialled numbers.

HOLD ONTO YOUR TICKETS

I'm writing to warn travellers to keep their airline ticket, as it may be demanded by their travel insurance company if they make a claim.

I didn't save my airline ticket after a recent trip but I did have papers and a credit card receipt to prove that I received medical care at a hospital in Slovenia. My insurer told me I needed to get my itinerary from

THUMBS UP!



Norman Kent awards a 'Thumbs up' to **THE DÉCOR CORPORATION**.

When the lid on his two-bottle wine cooler broke after many years of use he contacted **DÉCOR** to see how much a new lid would cost. He was sent a new lid free of charge but unfortunately it didn't fit on his old model. When he informed **DÉCOR** he was "gobsmacked" to receive a completely new wine cooler free of charge — it was even the same colour as his old one.

Joanne Andrews gives a 'Thumbs up' to **EVERDURE BARBECUES** for sending her a new regulator and hose free of charge when she complained that her barbecue was leaking gas.

my travel agent, but this wasn't possible as the agent destroys the papers three days after a client's arrival back in Australia.

The travel agent did give me proof of purchase of the tickets. This and photocopies of passport stamps seemed to satisfy the insurance company, as I got a cheque after paying the first \$100 as excess.

This was my first claim for travel insurance after many years of travelling. I was annoyed firstly that the brochure was poorly written and this requirement was buried in a list. And secondly that the bill from the hospital and my credit card receipt, both dated, were not enough proof to substantiate a claim.

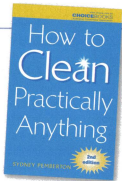
Patricia Varga

LETTER OF THE MONTH

We want to hear from you — your experiences help our research and often let other readers know about scams and rip-offs. Positive outcomes you've had to a complaint you took to a manufacturer, retailer, importer or tradesperson interest us too. Address these letters to *Thumbs up* at the address on page 2.

To thank you for writing to us, *Your Letters* awards a prize of a CHOICE book to the 'Letter of the month'. This month's winner, Patricia Varga, receives *How to clean practically anything* or any other book of her choice from Consumer Bookshelf, page 48.

We're sorry we don't have the resources to answer all your letters personally, and in the magazine we may edit them or print only an extract. See page 2 for how to reach us.



New twist on cold-calling scam

The Australian Securities & Investments Commission (ASIC) is warning consumers about a new type of cold-calling scam. This time scamsters are targeting people who have shares in foreign technology companies that became worthless during the share market crash of this type of stock.

The scamsters offer to buy these shares, which they've found in your name. They ask for your personal details and/or an upfront fee, which could be several thousand dollars. They claim the amount is needed to remove various restrictions on the sale of the shares.

This is clearly a scam and your best response is to hang up. But if you receive other out-of-the-blue calls with some kind of offer that's less obviously a scam, it still pays to be careful.

- Ask the caller for their name, address (don't accept a PO Box) and phone number. If they won't give them, hang up.
- If it's a financial offer, ask whether the company holds an Australian Financial Services licence (it needs this to be allowed to approach you).
- Be sceptical about any offer, especially if it comes from a company you don't know.
- If you're still interested, ask detailed questions about the offer and make notes.
- Don't say yes on the phone. Ask for the offer in writing, then finish the call and check out the company before you make a decision.

There's more information about scams on www.fido.gov.au, or you can call ASIC on 1300 300 630.



Health insurance premiums go up again



Administration Council (PHIAC). According to PHIAC, it and the federal Department of Health and Ageing scrutinised the proposed increases and made adjustments to rate increase applications for a small number of funds.

Use the premium increase as an opportunity to review your health cover and see if you can get a better deal.

Before signing up with any fund, read its brochure and other material thoroughly. Look for the following information and ask questions if there's anything that's not clear:

- What waiting periods will apply?
- Are any treatments limited to care as a private patient in a public hospital, rather than in a private hospital?
- Are any treatments excluded? Some

cheaper hospital policies exclude some conditions or treatments, which means you can only get treatment for them as a public patient in a public hospital, often with a waiting list. Some common exclusions are procedures such as major eye surgery and heart-related surgery. If you're young and healthy you may be prepared to risk exclusions like this, but review

your policy regularly and be prepared to switch to a different one when your needs change.

■ Agreeing to a high excess or co-payment can also reduce your premiums. Make sure you know what excess or co-payment you'll have to pay (there can be a difference between day hospital and overnight stays, for example). Is there an annual maximum per membership or do you have to pay it every time, regardless of how often you claim?

■ If you want to go to a specific private hospital or be covered for treatment by a specific health practitioner, will there be expenses you'll have to cover yourself? Ask which private hospitals and specialists the fund has arrangements with that will avoid this.

■ Some funds list extras (ancillary) benefits, such as for dental and optical cover, as a percentage. Is it a percentage of the fee you're charged or of a 'reasonable' fee set by the fund?

■ Check for combined ancillary limits, as there can be very large differences. For example, the policy may cover \$400 worth of physiotherapy, acupuncture and chiropractic combined in a year instead of \$400 for each.

This year health funds have increased their premiums on average by 5.68%, with the actual increase to your premium varying among funds, policies and states. While the average increase is lower than in previous years it's still significantly higher than inflation.

Health cover premium increases are subject to approval by the Private Health Insurance

What's really in a MEAT PIE?

Some brands have nice chunks of real meat. Others have unappetising gristle.

Who's never had a meat pie? Australians are the world's biggest consumers of them; they're a cultural icon. But would they keep that exalted position if most of us knew what's really in them?

HOW MUCH MEAT?

To find out how much meat there really is in a so-called meat pie we tested most of the national brands that you can buy either frozen from supermarkets or hot and ready to eat at sports venues or from service stations. We also included meat pies from the **JESTERS** and **MICHEL'S PATISserie** chains, which now operate in most states.

There's no chemical test specifically for 'meat'. What's measured is protein, and the meat content (as a percentage of the whole pie, not just of the filling) is calculated from this. But some of this 'meat' might never have had a pulse or worn a fur coat because manufacturers can include soy protein in the filling (as long as it's declared on the label) — and this also counts as 'meat' in the calculation. So we also measured the amount of soy protein in the filling. Removing this from the overall protein value gives a more realistic estimate of the actual meat content. The good news is that the most soy protein we found was 7% of the filling, and more than half the pies had at most only a trace.

JESTERS Stockmans, **MRS MAC'S** Good Eating Beef and **ELMSBURY** (from **ALDI**) have the most meat — it's a third or more of their ingredients. They're also among the pies in this test with the least fat and salt (see Table 1, page 11, for details). And with **ELMSBURY** you get a triple whammy — it's also one of the cheapest (along with **HOME BRAND** from **WOOLWORTHS/SAFEWAY** and **COLES Savings**). But if you like a pie when you're at the footy, the top-selling brands you're likely to find there — **FOUR 'N TWENTY**, **SARGENTS** and **HERBERT ADAMS** — all weighed in with less than 30% meat per pie. And **BIG BEN Extra**

IN A NUTSHELL

■ If you think the major ingredient in most meat pies is meat you're in for a disappointment. But some brands are meatier than others — see Table 1, page 11, for details.

■ The word 'meat' may not mean the same to you as it does to the Food Standards Code. Muscle meat (such as steak) is only one of the body parts that's covered by its definition.

WHAT TO BUY

JESTERS Stockmans	\$3.30
MRS MAC'S Good Eating Beef	\$2.35
ELMSBURY (Aldi) BEST BUY	\$0.55

If these are hard to find in your area (see Table 1 for where they're sold), look for pies in the table with a comparatively high meat content and lower levels of fat and sodium.



Body parts and gravy?

Under the Food Standards Code, a meat pie must be at least 25% 'meat'. The definition of meat, though, includes parts of the animal many people might not normally eat — such as snouts, ears, tongue roots, tendons and blood vessels. For some reason, however, only offal (such as brain, heart, kidney, liver, tongue, tripe) must be specified on the label.

The definition also includes body parts from animals you might not expect to be eating — buffalo, camel, deer, goat, hare, rabbit. Again, there's a slightly baffling proviso that they can only be "slaughtered other than in a wild state".

Food Standards Australia New Zealand is considering changes to the code to redefine 'meat' as the muscle meat that most people might expect in a pie and require manufacturers to tell you the species of animal it's come from on the label. For the moment, though, 'meat' means most parts of lots of animals.

Tasty, **SARGENTS Traditional** and **BLACK & GOLD** had even less meat than the modest 25% required by the Food Standards Code.

We also took a close look at the quality of the filling and found that while most brands are just mince, with no way of telling what kind of meat it is, **MRS MAC'S Choice Steak** and **ELMSBURY** have some substantial pieces of steak. On the downside, our analyst found bits of lung tissue in **BIG BEN Traditional**, **SARGENTS Traditional** and **MICHEL'S Traditional Minced Beef** pies, while **HOME BRAND** and **VILLI'S Gourmet Beef** had the most obvious gristle. (See *Body parts and gravy?*, above, for more on what can be in a pie.)

HEALTHY TUCKER?

According to a recent statement from the National Heart Foundation of Australia, "The ultimate Aussie icon, the meat pie, has undergone an extreme health makeover." Some brands of pie now even have the Heart Foundation tick logo. However, we're not convinced across the board.

On average the meat pies in this test have 21 g of fat per pie, compared with 23 g when we last looked at them in April 2002. (That's still equivalent to a lump of lard nearly as big as a golfball.) And the average sodium content hasn't changed — it's still about a third of the maximum recommended daily intake.

So does a pie with the Heart Foundation tick have less fat? The three brands with the tick (**JESTERS Ned Kelly**, **FOUR 'N TWENTY Lite** and **MRS MAC'S Good Eating Beef**) contain well under the 21 g average (13 g, 16 g and 18 g respectively), but there are other pies with 14 or 15 g (**ELMSBURY**, **JESTERS Stockmans**, **SCOTT'S Great Aussie** and **COLES Savings**) that don't have the tick.

The National Heart Foundation wouldn't tell us its nutrition criteria for awarding the tick, other than that it limits the amounts of saturated and trans fat

and sodium and has a minimum requirement for dietary fibre. Food manufacturers have to pay to use the tick logo and not all of them choose to do so, even when their products comply with the Heart Foundation's criteria. So don't assume pies without the tick are automatically less healthy.

If you're buying frozen pies, it's more useful to check the nutrition information panel. If each pie has less than 20 g fat and less than 700 mg sodium (in the table, that's less than 30% of the maximum recommended daily intake), they're up with the best. If you check Table 2, though (below right), you can see that still doesn't make them a healthy fast food — it's still a lot of fat and salt.

COMPARED WITH A BIG MAC?

So how do meat pies compare with other fast food? There are worse snacks. A **McDONALD'S Big Mac**, for example, has a little more fat and about the same amount of salt as the average pie. Compared with a **JESTERS Stockmans** pie, however, a **Big Mac** comes with nearly twice as much fat and 34% more salt.

There are plenty of healthier choices than even the best of the pies — a **SUBWAY Roast Beef 6"**, for example, or a **McDONALD'S Roast Chicken Salad**; even a piece of battered fried fish. But if you add chips to your fish or pie, you'll more than double the amount of fat you're eating in one meal.



Table 1. MEAT CONTENT AND NUTRITION

Brand (in order of meat content)	1 Meat content (%)	2 Energy (kJ / pie)*	2 Fat (g / pie)*	3 Sodium (% upper RDI)**	4 Weight (g / pie)	Price per pie (\$†)
JESTERS Stockmans (A)	42	1400	15	26	175	3.30
MRS MAC'S Good Eating Beef (B)	34	1850	18	29	200	2.35 (J)
ELMSBURY (Aldi)	32	1280	14	20	150	0.55
MRS MAC'S Choice Steak (C)	32	2090	23	49	200	3.75 (J)
VILF'S Gourmet Beef (D)	31	1710	22	27	160	2.80
AMESBURY BAKERIES Premium (Aldi)	30	1740	24	28	175	0.90
COLES Farmland	30	1610	22	36	175	1.05
FOUR 'N TWENTY Lite	30	1590	16	24	175	1.15
JESTERS Ned Kelly (E)	30	1230	13	23	175	3.25
SCOTT'S Great Aussie	29	1410	15	25	150	0.80
FOUR 'N TWENTY Traditional	28	1980	28	39	175	1.25
FOUR 'N TWENTY Chunky Steak	27	1870	25	41	175	1.15
MRS MAC'S Famous Beef (C)	27	2080	24	43	200	3.40 (J)
BIG BEN Traditional	26	1770	22	35	175	1.25
COLES Savings	26	1410	15	27	150	0.55
SARGENTS Premium Chunky Beef Royale	26	1720	21	28	175	1.45
HERBERT ADAMS Pepper Steak Chunky	25	2120	28	39	210	1.50
HOME BRAND (Woolworths / Safeway) (F)	25	1670	24	45	150	0.55
TASTE	24	2030	30	40	180	0.85
MICHEL'S Traditional Minced Beef (G)	23	1810	24	44	224 (H)	3.20
BIG BEN Extra Tasty	21	1930	24	62	175	0.95
SARGENTS Traditional	21	1880	25	38	175	1.30
BLACK & GOLD (IGA)	17	1530	21	22	150	0.85

* Energy is rounded to the nearest 10 kJ and fat to the nearest gram.

** RDI: recommended daily intake.

† Based on prices we paid in Melbourne in February 2006. We bought most of the pies frozen from supermarkets, in packs of four or six. You'll pay more to buy them singly and from service stations or sports venues.

(A) Available from Jesters outlets in Victoria and WA. It's to be renamed Chunky Beef and will be introduced in NSW later this year.

(B) Available from some supermarkets in WA and school canteens in all states.

(C) Available from some supermarkets in WA and service stations and convenience stores in all states.

(D) Available in convenience stores and service stations.

(E) Available from Jesters outlets in NSW, Victoria and WA.

(F) To be changed, but Woolworths didn't tell us when; check the nutrition panel for differences.

(G) The manufacturer says there's been a change of ownership since our test and they're tightening their quality control.

(H) No weight stated. This is the average of the pies we tested.

(J) Average retail prices, supplied by the manufacturer.

MAKE A MEAL OF IT

A meat pie served with some vegetables, such as potato (boiled, not chips), carrots and broccoli, makes a quick and easy meal. By adding the vegies, on average only 32% of the kilojoules will come from fat (according to the Dietary Guidelines for Australian Adults a moderate fat intake is 30%) and there's only 110 mg of sodium per 100 g of the meal (which would qualify as 'low salt' on a food label). If you add salt, mash the potatoes with butter or ladle on the gravy, though, you're heading down the slippery nutritional slope again.

1 Meat content

This is the percentage of meat in the whole pie, calculated from the weight of protein in the filling after removing the weight of soy protein. It's an average of six pies.

2 Energy and fat

These are the amounts on the pie's nutrition information panel.

3 Sodium

Calculated from the amount of sodium per pie given on the nutrition information panel and the maximum recommended daily intake (RDI) for adults (2300 mg).

4 Weight

Pies vary in size. Unless otherwise indicated, these are the weights given by the manufacturer on the label. When we weighed the pies, most were a little heavier.

Table 2. FAST FOOD (in order of fat per serve)

	Fat (g / serve)*	Energy (kJ / serve)*	Sodium (% upper RDI)**	Serve size (g)
SUBWAY Roast Beef 6"	5	1150	48	208
MCDONALD'S Roast Chicken Salad	7	970	20	300
Sweet and sour pork with rice (A)	11	1460	13	200
Battered fried fish (1 piece) (A)	12	1230	6	134
Tuna and salad wholemeal sandwich with mayo (A)	14	1110	20	153
PIZZA HUT Super Supreme Thin 'n Crispy (2 slices)	17	1640	49	140
Meat pie (B)	21	1680	34	170
Hot chips (1 serve) (A)	25	1840	11	140
MCDONALD'S Big Mac	25	2010	35	200
KFC Original Recipe Chicken (2 pieces)	29	1900	37	159
RED ROOSTER Rooster Roll	32	2740	40	238
Sausage roll (A)	33	1980	35	140
HUNGRY JACK'S Whopper	39	2740	41	269

* Fat rounded to the nearest gram and energy to the nearest 10 kJ.

** RDI: Recommended daily intake.

(A) Average figures taken from Australian food composition tables.

(B) Average from this test.

FINDING A NANNY

It's an unregulated industry and they're dealing with your children, so it pays to do your research before you choose one.

IN A NUTSHELL

■ **Nanny agencies can take some of the hard work out of finding a suitable nanny, but the services offered can vary and the costs are often significant. Be clear from the start about what you'll be getting.**

■ **Use our Which agency? checklist, page 14, to help choose a reputable agency that you can trust.**

■ **If you employ a nanny directly rather than through an agency you have responsibilities as an employer. See Employing direct, page 15.**

We're probably all aware of the much publicised overseas trials of nannies charged with harming babies in their care. For many parents it's already a difficult decision to leave a child to be cared for by someone else, and hearing these kinds of horror stories can make it even tougher.

In Australia, the impact of these cases, if anything, was to make nanny agencies even busier. "People stopped trusting their own judgment in hiring a nanny and felt they needed support from an agency," said Susan Rogan of Susan Rogan Family Care, previously director of the now defunct Australian Association of Nanny Agencies.

What's worrying is that the nanny agency industry isn't regulated and media stories in Australia have exposed some agencies that send nannies out to work with children without a police or reference check first.

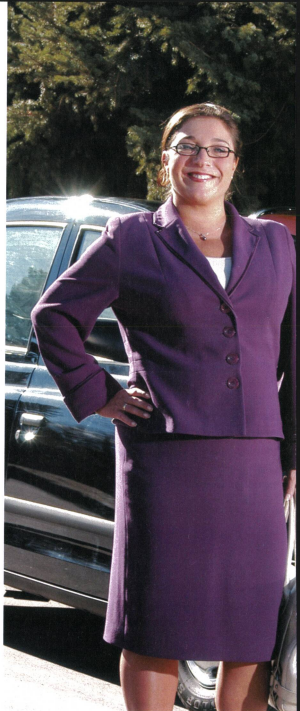
An additional concern we've heard voiced is that the 'professional nannies' on an agency's books may in fact be inexperienced and unqualified — far removed from what you'd expect from someone with that job title. However, research we conducted didn't support this concern — see *A 'nanny's' experience*, far right, for details.

In this article you'll find an outline of the different services nanny agencies can provide, the costs involved and how to make sure the agency you choose is reputable. We also look at what you need to consider if you want to cut out the middleman and employ a nanny directly.

NANNY AGENCY SERVICES

Finding a nanny privately can be time-consuming, stressful and hard work, which is why many people turn to an agency for help. A good nanny agency can make the process faster and easier, as well as provide peace of mind. These are the types of services it's reasonable to expect from an agency:

■ **Screening.** The agency should meet the nanny



face-to-face and check their identity. It should also check the nanny's references and qualifications, as well as ensure that police checks or 'working with children' checks are done (which type depends on the state you live in). See *Suitably screened*, page 15, for how it can work.

■ **Matching a nanny to the family.** Agencies should put forward candidates based on your requirements, so in theory you'll need to interview fewer people in order to find the right one for the job. And you should be provided with a copy of each candidate's CV prior to the interview. It's important that you make sure your requirements (such as non-smoker, must like pets, current driver's licence, prepared to do some housework) are very clear so that the agency can prescreen and you don't waste time



A 'nanny's' experience

We'd heard tales of parents interviewing 'nannies' put forward by agencies, only to find that the candidates were inexperienced and unqualified, so we decided to see how far our own candidate would get when applying to agencies.

We briefed 29-year-old Vanessa to contact agencies, presenting as someone interested in working as a nanny but whose only experience of childcare had been occasional babysitting for family. From the *Yellow Pages* she contacted at random 25 businesses in Sydney that appeared to be nanny agencies.

Out of the 25, only 10 agencies returned the contact and did in fact place nannies — already a sign of the hard work facing would-be nanny employers. All 10 rejected her: none would consider her for a nanny position where she'd have sole care of preschool children. However, some agencies were prepared to consider Vanessa for other types of work, including after-school care, being a mother's help or babysitting. She summarises her experience:

"As an undercover applicant, approaching agencies to become a nanny, my hopes were high that I'd be going for interviews, submitting résumés, etc.

"But being happy, confident and enthusiastic (as I tried to be) didn't win me a job with an agency. None wanted to promote a nanny with no qualifications or experience in a full-time role. I even had the feeling that some of the ladies I spoke to thought I was insulting the professional role of being a nanny, by thinking I could just become one overnight.

"My basic conclusion was that to be considered for a nannying post you need to have had around two years' experience in a full-time paid childcare role. Qualifications are preferred, and a first aid certificate is almost mandatory. It's no wonder I wasn't offered a job."



interviewing nannies who don't meet your basic selection criteria. *Placement problems*, page 16, highlights how critical this is.

■ **Support through the interview process.** Some agencies provide guidance for conducting interviews — the types of questions to ask and subjects to cover — so that you get good information to base your decision on.

■ **Assistance drawing up an employment contract.** It's useful to negotiate and agree on arrangements like salary, hours and leave entitlements with your nanny, and put these details into an employment contract. Some agencies will help with this.

■ **Ongoing support.** Agencies sometimes check back with both the family and the nanny once

employment has begun, to ensure that both parties are happy with the arrangement. See *Professional support*, page 14, for more.

THE COSTS INVOLVED

Nanny agencies can be expensive and the costs involved can vary widely, so be clear about the different costs and what they cover. Under each cost heading we've provided a guide to prices based on information we obtained from a small sample of agency websites.

■ **Registration fee.** Some agencies charge an initial registration or joining fee for setting up a relationship with the agency. This is essentially a guarantee of pay for the agency in case it spends time trying to find suitable applicants for a family,



PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT

Kate and Andrew from Melbourne chose their agency after hearing good things about it through friends, and have been very impressed with its professionalism.

One of the big positives is the follow-up support the agency provides. Kate said, "The agency keeps in fairly regular contact with us to see how everything is going. They also keep in contact with the nanny to make sure that she's happy too. We've recently completed a three-month review, which is not dissimilar to one you might do in any professional organisation, where we discussed our nanny's accomplishments, strengths, weaknesses and opportunities for improvement."

Kate and Andrew also like the flexibility that the agency offers for employing a nanny. "Employing a nanny directly is a big task if you're not used to employing people," said Kate. "We chose to employ our nanny through the agency so we don't have to worry about super, work cover or tax requirements. But if we want to employ our nanny directly in the future that's also possible."

only to find that they've found a nanny through other avenues. It may be charged in addition to a placement fee.

Range: \$55–\$77.

■ **Placement fee.** You pay this fee once you accept a nanny the agency has supplied. The agency may have an arrangement where you pay it in two instalments — the first when you accept the nanny and the outstanding amount payable once a trial period has passed. If for some reason the arrangement with the nanny doesn't work out within this trial period, the agency may offer to put forward more candidates until a replacement is found (see *Placement problems* for more).

The amount payable, the conditions of payment and the length of the trial period can vary from agency to agency. You should be provided with a written policy outlining the details.

Range: \$420–\$1100.

■ **Rate of pay.** This will vary, depending on the nanny's qualifications, experience, whether they're live-in or out, casual or permanent and whether or not you employ the nanny directly.

Some agencies are the nanny employer — they take care of all additional costs (like superannuation, insurance, holiday and sick pay) and you pay a rate that includes those costs.

Range: \$19–\$37.50 per hour.

Others act as referral agencies and help you find the nanny, but you employ them directly, and you'll need to negotiate the rate with your nanny. You'll pay a lower hourly rate, but you need to be aware of the additional costs and your obligations as an employer (see *Employing direct*, right, for details).

Range: \$12–\$25 per hour.

Some agencies give you both options.

WHICH AGENCY?

When you're choosing a nanny agency, personal recommendations are valuable but aren't always available. You'll need to do your research to determine if an agency's a good one, so with the help of Susan Rogan we've prepared a checklist of questions to ask before you commit yourself, which a reputable agency should be able to answer. Ask:

- How long has the agency been in the business, or (if the agency is new) how much experience in the industry has the agency's director/operator had?
- Where does the agency source its nannies?
- Do its nannies have first aid certificates as standard?
- What childcare qualifications and/or experience do its nannies have?
- Does it run training courses for its nannies, and provide opportunities for them to increase their skills?

A who's who of childcare

Agencies often provide a range of childcare alternatives, all with varying levels of experience and responsibilities. Here are the differences:

- **Babysitter.** This usually refers to a person who'll provide non-active childcare at night. Babysitters are often but not only students.
- **A mother's help** assists stay-at-home parents with childcare and light household duties. It's often someone who wishes to make a career in childcare but doesn't necessarily have any qualifications or much experience. It's not intended that they have sole responsibility for children.
- **An au pair** is a person who goes to a different country to live with a family and learn about the culture, language and way of life. *Au pair* is a French phrase meaning equal to, so the intent is that an au pair be treated as a member of the family. In exchange for lodging, board and a small allowance, the au pair will assist with the care of children and undertake light household work. Au pairs aren't necessarily trained childcare workers and may have no childcare experience. They're generally available to work for 25 hours a week, and they may have visa limitations.
- **A nanny** is responsible for the broad care of children. They generally have formal training (such as in childcare, nursing or teaching) and/or significant experience — at least two years — at a professional level. Consequently, hourly rates are higher than for au pairs. While they often undertake light household tasks, the focus of a nanny's role is on childcare, organising daily activities to help meet the child's social, physical and psychological requirements.
- **A governess** is someone employed to assist with the education of children, generally in their own homes, and often in more remote areas where schools aren't easily accessible.

- Does it insure the nannies on its books (WorkCover and/or public liability)?
- How detailed is its screening process? (Does it check references and qualifications, get police checks?)
- How does it go about matching nannies to families? Does it meet you to discuss your requirements?
- What support does it give the family during the recruitment process?
- Does it assist with drawing up the employment contract between family and nanny? (See *Employing direct* for what this should include.)
- What ongoing support does it provide families? Does it check back to see if the arrangement is working? Does it offer back-up support if a nanny gets sick or fails to show up?
- What advice can it give parents about employment law and their responsibilities and risks as an employer?
- What costs are involved and what do they cover? (For example, registration fee, placement fee, etc).

EMPLOYING DIRECT

"After interviewing her, I employed this nanny, setting up a payroll with superannuation and taxation which I took care of myself (big learning curve!) ... I would urge anyone considering hiring a nanny privately to do their homework thoroughly."

Greg, Townsville.

"We were left in the lurch a bit when we realised we didn't negotiate any minimum notice for departure."

David, Melbourne.

Employing a nanny through an agency may save you time and stress, but it can be costly and you may prefer to go it alone, particularly if you want a permanent,

Child Care Benefit

- The Child Care Benefit helps you with the cost of long day care, family day care, occasional care, outside school hours care, vacation care and registered care. If you're employing a nanny through an agency that's been approved as an in-home care provider by the Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (you'll need to check this with the agency), you may be able to receive a payment of up to \$2.88 per hour to help with the costs, up to 20 hours a week (this will increase to 24 hours in July 2006). However, the benefit is means-tested and there are other conditions you need to meet to be eligible. For more information contact your nearest family assistance office at Centrelink.

full-time nanny. However, you need to be aware of your obligations as an employer, which include:

- **Salary and tax.** You have to provide pay advice records and PAYG payment summaries (formerly group certificates) and submit PAYG tax. See *Useful resources*, page 16, for help.
- **Superannuation.** Domestic workers who work more than 30 hours a week are entitled to super at the specified rate (currently 9% on top of their pay).
- **Holiday leave and sick leave.** There are minimum leave entitlements for full-time and part-time employees, which vary from state to state.
- **Insurance.** It's strongly recommended that you have insurance that covers domestic employees in the event of injury in the workplace (your home) or on their way to and from work. Domestic workers' compensation may be included in your home contents insurance, but you'll need to check your policy carefully. For details of what you need regarding insurance go to the WorkCover website for your state.

It's preferable if all these details are negotiated and documented in an employment contract or agreement, which should also include details like roles and responsibilities required, notice period, etc.

If you've avoided using an agency altogether, it'll be up to you to screen the nannies. These are some steps you can take:

- Ask for a CV and look at the person's work

SUITABLY SCREENED

One of the main reasons Sam and her friend Sarah used an agency in the first place was peace of mind. Sam said, "We were looking for a nanny to share and didn't feel that we had the experience to do all the background checking, child protection and criminal record checks, and know the sorts of questions to ask in order to get a feel for whether the person is genuine and appropriately qualified, so we chose to go through the agency."

Sam had a meeting with its owner/director and walked away feeling much more at ease about finding and using a nanny as part of her childcare when she returned to work. "The director is a self-confessed paranoid mother and she doesn't recommend anyone she wouldn't be happy to have looking after her own children. We were really happy with the degree of screening the agency put its candidates through," Sam said.

During the recruitment process they received updates every couple of days and were pleased with the quality and attentiveness of the service given to them. "We felt that the agent really listened when we discussed what sort of person we were looking for and what was important to us both," said Sam. "We liked the first nanny she recommended."



experience over the last five years. Enquire about any unexplained gaps.

■ Ask for references and speak to the referees directly. Ask in-depth questions, including “Why did they leave your employment?” and “Would you employ them again?”

■ Get a police check. In some states you can request a Working With Children Check, which includes a police check.

USEFUL RESOURCES

■ Australian Tax Office (www.ato.gov.au). From the ‘Individuals’ home page, click on ‘Employment’ under the heading ‘Your situation’, and there you’ll find a link to ‘Employing household staff’.

■ Australian Institute of Family Services (www.aifs.gov.au) has a guide to police clearances and checks. From the home page, click on the link for the ‘National Child Protection Clearinghouse’ project website, and look under the ‘Safety issues’ heading in its ‘Resources’ section.

■ WageNet (www.wagenet.gov.au) gives information about minimum leave entitlements for employees. ■



PLACEMENT PROBLEMS

Penny and Ian from Sydney wanted a full-time nanny to care for their three boys (then aged four, three and nine months) so that Penny could return to work on a full-time basis. They enlisted an agency to help with the process.

The agent obtained a general description from them of the duties required, which were fairly standard, and the type of person they were looking for — namely someone with previous experience, a non-smoker, preferably a younger person with lots of energy who had a driver’s licence and enjoyed outdoor activities.

The terms of the agreement were that they’d pay an initial deposit, with the full fee immediately due after employing a candidate. There was a six-week trial period during which, if a candidate was found not suitable by the family or vice versa, the agency would find a replacement candidate at no extra cost.

After interviewing about six candidates put forward by the agency, Penny and Ian selected a nanny and she started work, but after little more than a week she failed to turn up. Attempts to phone her were met by hang-ups, so they contacted the agency to explain what had happened. It agreed to find a replacement. “However, the staff we were dealing with seemed incredibly uninterested in us, and the applicants the agency forwarded to us for interview became increasingly irrelevant to our selection criteria,” said Penny.

Initially, the replacements the agency sent were people with no previous experience. Penny and Ian rang to complain but to no effect — as the interviews progressed they found the candidates were further and further from their selection criteria.

Penny said, “We interviewed each candidate that was offered to us by the agency — around 30 people in total. Our patience finally ran out after we interviewed a candidate who had no experience, no driver’s licence and was a smoker. We rang again to complain, only to be told that we were being fussy and that they had sent us perfectly good nannies. The very clear implication was that it was our fault we hadn’t found a nanny.”

Penny wrote a number of letters of complaint to the agency, none of which was answered. “We weren’t refunded our agency fee and unfortunately — although we had a definite claim against them under the terms of the agreement — we succumbed to apathy and didn’t take the matter further. However, it continues to grate and whenever people ask me how to go about finding a nanny, I take care to warn them not to use that particular agency,” she said.

IS THIS HEALTHFOOD?

Its image may be healthy, but the food in supermarkets' healthfood aisles is often anything but.

If someone asked you to picture a healthfood product, you might think of dried fruit and nuts, rice cakes, tofu or vegetable juice. You might also think of soy drinks, organic muesli or gluten-free pasta. Certainly it'll be a food that's generally deemed to be good for you, or has some health-giving qualities. So if you're shopping in the healthfood aisle of a supermarket, these are the types of assumptions you might make about the foods you'll find there.

To see if these assumptions held true, we took a closer look at a selection of foods from the healthfood aisle of major supermarkets. Sadly we found as much hype as health.

THE FOUR FURPHIES OF HEALTHFOOD

If it's in the healthfood aisle, it must be healthy

Don't kid yourself...

■ The 50 g **BE NATURAL** Yoghurt Coated Almond & Apricot bar we got from the healthfood aisle contains more saturated fat, and more fat overall, than a **MCDONALD'S** Cheeseburger.

■ The 25% 'natural' fruit in **GOLDEN DAYS** Apricot Meteorites sounds good. But the almost 25% fat (mostly saturated)? Not so good.

■ Nutritionally, **GO NATURAL** Apricot Pieces in Yoghurt from the healthfood aisle and **CADBURY** Cherry Ripe Chocettes are very similar. They even contain a similar amount of fruit. But we've yet to see **Cherry Ripe** classified as a healthfood.

■ What **WELL, NATURALLY** Sugar-free Dark Chocolate lacks in sugar, it makes up for in fat. A 45 g bar contains around four teaspoons of fat — almost twice as much as in a 60 g **MARS** bar. And the sweeteners it contains can have a laxative effect if you eat a lot of it.

If it's free of additives or preservatives, or organic, it must be good for you

Not necessarily...

■ **ABUNDANT EARTH** Organic Hot Chocolate Dutch Chocolate may be free of pesticide residues, but with 70% sugar it's not exactly good for you.

■ **FREEDOM FOODS** Potato Chips have no MSG, artificial flavours, colours or preservatives, but

IN A NUTSHELL

■ Don't assume that all foods in supermarket healthfood aisles are healthy. We could see no reason why many of the products we found there would be considered healthfoods.

■ Healthfood aisles stock organic foods and foods free of certain allergens. There are legitimate reasons why you might choose these over conventional products, but a major difference in nutritional value isn't one of them.

■ What you buy is more important than where you buy it from. To make healthier choices compare products using the nutrition information on their packaging.



they're full of fat, including saturated fat. In fact with over three teaspoons of fat in a 50 g bag, they contain more than SMITH'S Crisps Original, their mainstream equivalent.

■ AJITAS Vege Chips BBQ are free of artificial colours, artificial flavours, genetically modified ingredients, preservatives, cholesterol and added MSG. But one 100 g pack contains around 40% of the maximum recommended daily intake of salt.

■ SANITARIUM Natural Freshly Roasted Peanut Butter Crunchy doesn't contain preservatives or stabilisers, but like any peanut butter it's still high in fat, including saturated fat.

Products in the healthfood aisle are better for you than their mainstream equivalents

Not always...

■ SWEET WILLIAMS Original Dairy Free Chocolate and LINDT 85% Cocoa Dark Chocolate are both dairy-free, so both equally OK for people with lactose intolerance, although neither is overly healthy. The main difference? It's unlikely you'll find LINDT chocolate in the healthfood aisle.

■ The PRUE SOBERS Raspberry Fruit Spread that we found in the healthfood aisle claims to contain no artificial sweeteners, but the same is true for its mainstream equivalent, COTTEE'S 100% Fruit Raspberry Spread, and they're nutritionally very similar. Why they're in different aisles is a mystery.

■ Nutritionally, there's little difference between the GOLDEN DAYS Apricot Delight that we found in the healthfood aisle and the regular aisle's

ROBERN Apricot Indulgence. Interestingly, GOLDEN DAYS, the 'healthfood', contains less fruit (29% compared with 40%).

If it's 'natural' it must be healthy

Definitely not...

■ The healthfood aisle is full of products with brand names like BE NATURAL, GO NATURAL and WELL, NATURALLY, which conjure up images of wholesome food, kept as nature intended. Even if they do contain some 'natural' ingredients (and there's no standard definition for 'natural', so it's a meaningless claim) it doesn't mean you can assume they're healthy, as our examples above show. (And by the way, despite what the name might imply, NORGANIC products aren't all fully organic.)

ONLINE SHOPPING SLIP-UPS

Healthfood hiccups aren't just restricted to the instore aisles, as a trawl through the healthfood section of supermarkets' online shopping websites revealed:

■ The 'Healthfood' section of COLES ONLINE has the subcategory 'Low fat bars'. The Code of Practice on Nutrient Claims states that low-fat food can't contain more than 3% fat, but many of the products listed under this heading contain much more than that.

■ The subcategory 'Health bars/snacks/drinks/teas' in the 'Health Foods' section of WOOLWORTHS HOMESHOP includes less-than-healthy products such as the BE NATURAL and GO NATURAL products mentioned above.

SUPERMARKETS SAY...

Some of the products CHOICE found in healthfood aisles seemed to be far removed from what we'd consider to be healthy, so we asked the major supermarkets, COLES and WOOLWORTHS, how they decide what's stocked in them.

COLES is in the process of rolling out a new format for its healthfood section, consisting of the following six sections, which will be labelled both at the front of the aisle and at key points along it:

- 'Organic'. ■ 'Supplements'.
- 'Free from'. ■ 'Hydration'.
- 'Good for you'. ■ 'Diet and sport'.

A spokesperson for COLES told us it's always reviewing the product mix in its healthfood section, and its healthfood team includes a nutritionist to audit its healthfood product mix and make recommendations to further improve its product offering.

WOOLWORTHS' healthfood section has three distinct subsections, each with different criteria:

■ The 'free from' section includes products that are gluten, wheat or dairy-free. These products cater for people with dietary intolerances.





- The 'organic' section consists of certified organic products.
- The 'healthy' section includes functional foods or products that are supposed to be 'better for you' than a mainstream equivalent. Being 'better for you' may be because the product is, for example, lower in sugar or salt, higher in fibre or preservative-free.

A WOOLWORTHS spokesperson said it consults qualified nutritionists regarding this category. They went on to say that, "Foods positioned in the healthfood section of WOOLWORTHS stores relate to choices people make about their health, and that it's in no way implying that these products will make everyone healthier."

Both supermarkets made the point that the term 'healthfood' is very subjective. We don't think their 'healthfood' offerings are helping give this term any more objective a definition for consumers.

MORE HELP WITH HEALTH

If you're trying to eat healthily and the healthfood aisle of supermarkets is a regular port of call during your weekly shop, chances are you're getting a bum steer, as many foods we found in this aisle are far from what would generally be considered healthy. It's a good idea for the supermarkets to consult nutritionists about the products sold in healthfood aisles, but to further help you make informed food choices we'd like to see them do the following too:

- **Clearly label the 'organic' and 'free from' sections.** We agree with COLES and WOOLWORTHS that it makes sense to have a dedicated section for 'free from' products (eg wheat, gluten or dairy-free) for people with dietary intolerances. Likewise, a section for organic food is helpful for people who specifically want to buy it — it saves you hunting for it among other food. But 'organic' and 'free

from' don't always equate to 'good for you', so these sections should be distinct (if not separate) from the general 'healthfood' section.

- **Review products that are currently in the healthfood aisle because they're deemed to be 'good for you' or 'better for you' than their mainstream equivalents.** Having fewer additives or less sugar doesn't necessarily mean these products are healthy, as we showed earlier; they can contain more fat, for example. To lump all these products under the term 'healthfood' can be misleading. 'Healthfood' may have no standard definition, but we think that products categorised as such should at least meet certain broad nutrition criteria.

- **Review the healthfood section of online shopping websites.** Criteria for products in the healthfood section of supermarkets' online shopping websites should be consistent with those in stores. Because consumers aren't able to compare nutrition information online, it's all the more important that the category headings accurately reflect the foods listed under them.

A healthy profit?

Foods in the healthfood aisle are often more expensive than their conventional counterparts. In some cases it's difficult to understand why. Take these products, for example:

- We found ABUNDANT EARTH Sauniers Organic Macrobiotic Sea Salt in the healthfood aisle at three times the price of SAXA Sea Salt Crystals. But salt's salt — it's certainly not a healthfood and neither is it an organically produced product (see *Designer salt* in last month's CHOICE for more).
- GO NATURAL Apricot High Fibre Meal Bar is very similar to NANA DIVER'S Mini Meal Lite Apricot & Sultana. However, we found it in the healthfood aisle and it cost 48% more.

Hard copy

Ease of use really matters with a DVD/hard disc recorder.

IN A NUTSHELL

■ The major difference between the models in the What to buy list and the rest is ease of use.

■ DVD recorders with a hard disc can store a lot of TV, but you have to make a trade-off between storage capacity and picture quality.

■ Multiple DVD formats curb a machine's usefulness — we'd like to see them simplified.

The models in our latest test of DVD recorders contain the sexy technology you'd expect, such as the timeshift feature that lets you start watching a program before you've finished recording it. And their hard disc also gives them the advantage of greater storage capacity.

The DVD/hard disc recorders on test can be set to record at highest quality (about one hour's worth of recording on a DVD), mid quality (about four hours) and low quality (6–13 hours on a DVD). And when set on low quality you can store anything from 96 to 356 hours of programming on the hard disc — that's a lot of episodes of *The West Wing*.

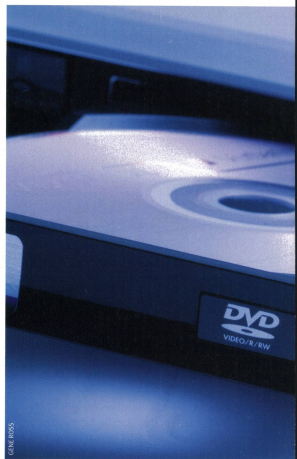
However, the more data you store, the more the machine has to compress it, which is why it's called low quality — the picture quality suffers. This is particularly noticeable on a big screen, so it's best not to use the maximum-capacity mode if you'll be watching your recorded DVDs on a screen larger than about 60 cm.

All in all, the models in this test play and record well. Some (the PHILIPS, LG and SONY) are better than others at handling disc errors such as scratches — an important feature if you rent lots of DVDs and want to avoid the frustration of your movie freezing or stuttering.

THEY CAN SEND A MAN TO THE MOON, BUT...

Despite DVD/hard disc recorders' nifty features, the same old problems from VCR days persist, such as unintuitive remotes and illogical onscreen menus. And as always, the number of different connections can freak out the less technically minded. Thankfully that's only an issue when you're first setting up the machine. See *Video connections*, page 23, for an explanation of what's what.

It's worth noting that as this technology is relatively new, we don't have any data on recorder reliability. All the machines' manuals except one contained cautions and disclaimers about looking after the hard discs. So read the manual and follow the care instructions (don't move it while it's



working or place it near extreme heat, for example). Otherwise your piece of rather pricy technology might need replacing before its time.

FORMAT FIASCOS

If you intend to play your recorded DVDs on friends' DVD players, be aware that different discs won't always work in different machines. That's because the way data is distributed on DVD is dictated by two competing groups, the DVD Forum and the DVD Alliance. Unfortunately for the consumer, their dictates don't always match.

Here are some of the formats you'll come across, and a guide to what they mean:

- **DVD-R:** A write-once disc format (you can only copy onto it once) with 4.7 GB capacity, which is supported by the DVD Forum.
- **DVD-RW:** A rewritable DVD format, also supported by the DVD Forum.
- **DVD+R:** A write-once disc with 4.7 GB capacity that's supported by the DVD Alliance.
- **DVD+RW:** A rewritable DVD format, supported by the DVD Alliance.
- **DVD-video:** A read-only format commonly used for movies.
- There's also **DVD RAM**, a format that's physically different from the others and supported by only some products.

Rewritable DVDs can usually be erased and rewritten about 1000 times. See the table *Which*



formats?, below, for which models can play and record onto which kind of DVD.

The LG also has two memory card slots (Compact Flash and Secure Digital [SD]), so you can play and record some digital files from your digital camera, music player and so on. The PANASONIC is supposed to have SD, but we couldn't get it to work. All the models tested can play MP3 and JPEG files if they're on CD. The JVC, LG, NEC and TOSHIBA can also play WMA (Windows Media) files.

WHICH FORMATS?	Play	Record
DVD-R	All	All except Philips
DVD-RW	All	All except Philips
DVD+R (A)	All	LG, NEC, Philips, Sony
DVD+RW	All	LG, NEC, Philips, Sony
DVD-video	All	None
DVD RAM	JVC, LG, Panasonic, Samsung, Toshiba	LG, Panasonic, Samsung, JVC, Toshiba (C)
SVCD (B)	JVC, LG, NEC, Philips, Pioneer, Sony, Toshiba	None

(A) The NEC, LG and Sony can record on double-layer +R discs too, which effectively give you twice the recording time of standard +R, but cost more.

(B) Super video CD. All the models can play music CDs, recordable and rewritable CDs (CD-R, CD-RW) and VCD (video CD, which is a CD that plays and records video and is cheaper than a DVD). They can all record on CD-R, CD-RW and VCD. SVCD uses a different compression method from VCD.

(C) JVC and Toshiba only on some DVD RAM discs.

What to buy

Models are profiled in rank order.



SONY RDR-HX710

Price: \$999

GOOD POINTS

- The easiest to use.
- Excellent reception and replay scores.
- Played our faulty DVD without difficulty.
- Uses very little energy on standby.
- The most sensitive tuner, so good if you're in an area with weak TV signals.

BAD POINTS

- Many of the buttons on the remote are too small.
- Quite a delay when changing channels.



PANASONIC DRM-EH50

Price: \$659

GOOD POINTS

- Easy to use.
- Received the highest rating for recording in mid-capacity mode.
- Rated best in the test for DVD playback.

BAD POINTS

- Had difficulty playing our faulty DVD.
- The SD memory card slot on the recorder is located on the right-hand side of the DVD drawer, where the open/close button usually is, which is confusing.
- The remote has a jog dial for navigation, which is very sensitive so it's easy to overshoot the mark when fast-forwarding.



LG RH7796W

Price: \$999

GOOD POINTS

- Easy to use.
- Records and plays almost every type of disc available.
- Has the highest recording capacity (low-quality mode) on its hard disc — up to 356 hours.
- Bookmarking lets you jump to a specific point during DVD playback.
- Played our faulty DVD without difficulty.
- Uses very little energy on standby.

BAD POINTS

- Rated poorest in our recording test in high-quality mode.
- Quite slow to start up and read what disc type has been inserted.
- The display on the recorder itself doesn't provide much useful information.

PROFILES/CONSUMER

WHAT ABOUT THE REST?

All the other models have excellent TV reception and sound quality, and provide a superior picture when playing a commercial DVD. You'd probably be happy with most of them if you found them at a good price — at \$599 the NEC is the cheapest model tested. The SAMSUNG was the easiest of the rest to use.

The JVC and TOSHIBA have longer recording time available than the others, but the TOSHIBA had more trouble than most playing our faulty discs, which would be a disadvantage if you hire a lot of DVDs. It's also a machine for the technophile, but may intimidate less savvy users.

The PHILIPS scored very high for playing faulty discs but was rated particularly low for ease of use. One of its component connections also had some errors, which could cause colour problems in some TVs.

PERFORMANCE

Brand / model (in rank order)	1 Overall score (%)	2 Ease of use score (%)	3 Picture quality score (%)	4 Sound quality score (%)	5 Error correction score (%)	6 Standby energy score (%)	7 TV reception score (%)	8 DVD replay score (%)
SONY RDR-HX710	84	77	81	96	78	98	96	96
LG RH7796W	82	74	78	93	82	93	92	88
PANASONIC DMR-EH50	81	74	80	93	66	93	91	97
NEC NDH-80	80	68	83	92	74	94	93	88
PIONEER DVR-530H	79	67	77	96	70	96	90	94
JVC DR-MH30 SAA	78	67	80	94	72	78	94	91
SAMSUNG DVD-HR720 (A)	78	75	76	92	69	72	92	95
TOSHIBA RD-XS34 5G (A)	77	63	79	92	66	93	89	97
PHILIPS DVDR-520H (A)	76	55	78	97	88	87	95	94

What to look for

■ **Remote controls** should have buttons that are sized, shaped and spaced so you can easily find and press them individually. They should be grouped so you can quickly go to specific functions, and the most commonly used buttons should be prominent. There should be clear English labels or obvious symbols.

■ **Front panel controls** that allow you to fast-forward, rewind or pause a DVD or change channels from the recorder without having to use the remote.

■ **Front panel displays** should indicate the machine's status (on, off or on standby), the type of disc playing and a readout of track numbers and total time of the track.

■ **Onscreen menus** should be large and easy to read, with a logical structure, so you don't have to resort to the manual to find settings and functions. It's an advantage to have some control over the onscreen opacity, so you don't miss anything (on the TV or the menu) if you need to change a setting while your favourite show is on.

■ **Written instructions** should be detailed enough, in plain language, to let you easily set up and use the recorder. Clear descriptions and pictures can be very useful, particularly if you're connecting your recorder to a number of other devices.

■ **Timeshift/timeslip/chase playback** are all names applied to a useful function that frees you from waiting for a recording to finish before you start to watch it — so if you come home halfway through a show you're recording, you can watch it from the

beginning while it records the end.

In addition, as long as you have timeshift switched on while you're watching TV, you can just hit the pause button while you answer the phone or make a cuppa. Then, when you're ready, you hit play. The recorder plays from where you paused it while continuing to record ahead.

Timeshift also allows you to do your own instant replay. With it switched on, if you missed that last brilliant tennis shot, you just hit the back button and watch it, then fast forward to where you were and you don't miss a thing.

All the tested models can timeshift.

■ **The number of recording events/types** needs to match your normal recording patterns. Check not only how many events you can set but also what type — individually by date and time, or also daily and/or weekly. All the models on test can be set to record more than once both daily and weekly.

OTHER FEATURES THEY (ALMOST) ALL HAVE

■ **Analogue tuner** that allows automatic, manual and manual fine tuning of TV channels; and channel skip or its equivalent. If you want to use your machine to record from digital TV, you'll need to connect it to a set-top box, which allows your recorder to receive digital TV.

■ **Menu options** for 4:3 letterbox, 4:3 pan & scan and 16:9 ratio display (but the availability of the feature can depend on the disc being played).

■ **Picture zoom DVD** — the LG, NEC, SAMSUNG and TOSHIBA have this feature.



GENE BOSS

■ **Bookmarking** allows you to set markers at spots in the recording that you want to return to later. It's very handy for finding that particular song in a concert, or your footy team's winning try or goal. The JVC, LG, NEC and SAMSUNG have bookmarking.

■ **Resume play DVD**, except the PHILIPS.

■ Various playback and search speeds.

■ Simple, quick or one-touch recording as well as timer recording.

■ All models allow you to copy a DVD to the hard disc, and vice versa.

IFICATIONS

D r o i n g (h) s	Hard disc recording (hours)*	Hard disc capacity (MB)	Size (W x D x H, mm)	Warranty (years)	Origin	Manufacturer / distributor	Price (\$)**
8	33 / 269	160	430 x 328 x 75	1	Malaysia	Sony	999
6	66.5 / 356	250	430 x 350 x 55	1	Korea	LG	999
8	17 / 142	80	430 x 351 x 63	1	Japan	Panasonic	659
6	20 / 111	80	430 x 350 x 55	1	Indonesia	NEC	599
13	17 / 227	80	420 x 273 x 59	1	China	Pioneer	699
8	36 / 300	160	435 x 350 x 70	1	China	Hagemeyer	899
8	18 / 127	80	430 x 255 x 79	1	Korea	Samsung	699
8	70 / 276	160	430 x 336 x 58	1	China	Castel	999
6	16 / 96	80	430 x 316 x 66	3	China	Philips	799

* Hard disc recording and DVD recording are for highest quality/lowest quality recording

** Prices are recommended retail, as provided by manufacturers in March 2006.

(A) Discontinued, but may still be available in shops.

1 Overall score

The overall score is a combination of the following:

- Ease of use score: 30%
- Picture quality score: 30%
- Sound quality score: 10%
- Error correction score: 10%
- Standby energy score: 10%
- TV reception score: 5%
- DVD replay score: 5%

2 Ease of use score

A panel assessed the following:

- Remote control: 30%
- Ease of setting the timer to record the same day and in the future, and of finding and renaming a file on the hard disc: 30%
- Instructions: 10%
- Onscreen display: 10%
- Front panel controls: 10%
- Front panel display: 10%

3 Picture quality score

Based on technical tests of the recorder's ability to produce good-quality pictures recorded and played back from video test signals at the recorder's lowest, mid and highest compression.

4 Sound quality score

Based on technical tests of the recorder's ability to produce good-quality sound recorded and played back from audio test signals at the recorder's lowest, mid and highest compression.

5 Error correction score

This checks how well the recorders can handle both a CD and a DVD with imperfections. We played our specially made test discs, which have a range of simulated scratches and dirt. The scores for CD and DVD are equally weighted and the higher the score, the less trouble the machine had playing the discs.

6 Standby energy score

We measured the power each machine uses in standby mode or equivalent (when it's been turned off by the remote control but is still connected to the power). The higher the score, the lower the energy consumption.

7 TV reception score

A more sensitive device (with a higher score) will give better reception in areas with weak signals. All these products have a single analogue TV tuner.

8 DVD replay score

Based on technical tests of the recorder's ability to produce good-quality pictures from a test DVD.

9 Hard disc and DVD recording times

The number of hours manufacturers claim for highest quality (lowest compression) and lowest quality (highest compression). These are approximations only because actual recording times vary, depending on the nature of the images being recorded. For instance, images of grass or trees blowing in the wind are more difficult to compress than, say, a still image like a building.

Video connections

Can't tell composite video from component? Here's a guide to the different kinds of video connection and what they're used for (note that, apart from SCART and HDMI, they all require separate audio connections). They matter because your DVD recorder needs to have connections that match the ones on your TV and any other device you want to connect it to.

■ **AV composite** is found on most modern TVs. The brightness and colour signals are combined into a single video signal.

■ **S-video** is identifiable by a small, round, four-pin plug. It provides better picture quality than composite because the brightness and colour signals are kept separate.

■ **Component** separates the picture even

further into brightness and colour signals, providing even better quality. Three video cables are required.

■ **DVI** (digital video interface) is a connector for video that can carry digital video signals to a screen that can display them; it's often used to connect a digital camcorder.

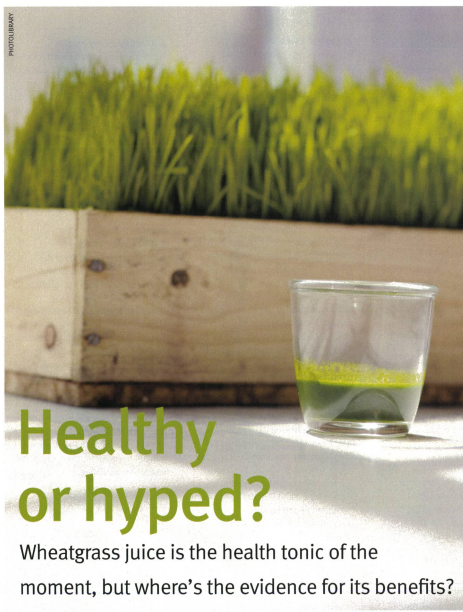
■ **HDMI** (high-definition multimedia interface) is an all-digital connection for both video and sound in one cable. HDMI connections can accept DVI input if you have a special cable, but you have to connect sound separately.

■ **SCART** (syndicat des constructeurs d'appareils radioécepteurs et téléviseurs) is also known as a Euroconnector. This is a 21-pin connector for analogue video, including component and RGB signals, and sound.

WHICH CONNECTIONS?

TV antenna cable in / out	All
Composite in / out	All
S-video in / out	All
Component out	All
DVI in	All except Panasonic
HDMI	LG
SCART	JVC, Panasonic, Toshiba

Some of the tested recorders have multiples of any one type of connection, but they may not be available all at once. To avoid any problems, tally up the number of devices you might want to connect to a recorder at the same time (such as a TV, set-top box, camcorder and the like) and check with the retailer that this is possible before you buy.



Healthy or hyped?

Wheatgrass juice is the health tonic of the moment, but where's the evidence for its benefits?

IN A NUTSHELL

■ **Don't believe all you hear or read** — very little good-quality evidence exists to support the extravagant claims made for the benefits of wheatgrass juice.

■ **Wheatgrass juice may provide some vitamins and minerals, but in tiny amounts.** A shot isn't a substitute for eating a variety of fresh fruit and veg.

It's difficult not to be cynical about something that's claimed to be good for pretty much everything. If you believe the hype, wheatgrass can nourish the blood and detoxify poisons, purify the liver, rebuild the bloodstream, boost energy and immunity, play a role in keeping teeth and bones strong, melt excess fat in your system, help treat acne and even keep your hair from going grey — and all before breakfast. (It's generally recommended you drink wheatgrass juice first thing in the morning on an empty stomach for best effects.)

The websites of wheatgrass juice, kits and juicer sellers are overflowing with testimonials from people whose lives have been improved by taking wheatgrass. Good-quality evidence to support the claims is another story. We searched the medical literature for the evidence on wheatgrass to see which claims, if any, could be substantiated.

"A shot of wheatgrass juice is nutritionally equivalent to a kilo of fresh green vegies"

Not true.

It's reported that the origin of this claim dates back to the 1930s when the 'father of wheatgrass', Charles F Schnabel, supposedly said, "Fifteen pounds of wheatgrass is equivalent to 350 pounds of the choicest vegetables." Certainly wheatgrass has some nutritional value, but not to that extent.

We compared the nutrients in a shot of wheatgrass juice with a similar quantity (about 30 g) of cooked spinach and broccoli. Even this small amount of these vegies contains more of certain minerals and vitamins, including calcium, vitamin C and folic acid, than wheatgrass juice. Plus they contain fibre.

Since not everyone likes spinach or broccoli or makes the time to cook them, we substituted a garden salad — of a variety and size similar to what you'd get in a fast-food outlet — for comparison, and it blitzed the shot of wheatgrass juice for fibre and a range of nutrients. A whole kilogram of vegies is beyond comparison.

Daily wheatgrass juice doesn't mean you can ignore the recommended five veg and two fruit serves a day. It can contribute a little towards them, sure, but it's not a substitute for fresh fruit and veg.

"Wheatgrass acts as an anti-inflammatory and has wound-healing properties"

Limited supporting evidence. Good-quality studies are needed to back up observational findings.

The use of wheatgrass extract has produced clinical observations of improvement in symptoms and healing in patients with conditions including eczema, fractures, burns, osteoarthritis and skin cancers, to name just a few. These observations are interesting and deserve attention, but it can't be assumed that the improvements were as a direct result of the use of wheatgrass. To support the observations, controlled clinical trials are needed, but only a few have been conducted.

One trial (in 2002) of patients with active distal ulcerative colitis — an inflammatory disease of the bowel — found that the severity of some symptoms of the disease was significantly reduced in the group receiving 100 mL of wheatgrass juice compared with

those on a placebo, and the conclusion was that it may be an effective treatment for this condition. The results are promising, but the sample size was small — just 21 patients, with only 19 completing the trial — so results can't be generalised. No trials since have confirmed its findings.

In a clinical setting, some improvements in symptoms have been seen when a cream containing wheatgrass extract has been used to treat plantar fasciitis — an injury affecting the sole of the foot, which becomes painful and tender. But when put to the test in a randomised, double-blind placebo-controlled trial, the application of wheatgrass cream was found to be no more effective than the placebo.

“Wheatgrass builds red blood cells and improves circulation and tissue oxygenation”

Based on conjecture: needs more research.

These claims seem to be based on the presence of chlorophyll, the green pigment in plants that plays the key role in photosynthesis. It makes up more than 70% of the solid content of wheatgrass juice and its molecular structure is a bit like that of haemoglobin, the component of red blood cells that transports oxygen. The theory is that because chlorophyll and haemoglobin are alike in structure, taking wheatgrass juice enhances haemoglobin production. But as far as evidence goes, there's little to be found.

One small pilot study of 16 patients with transfusion-dependent beta thalassaemia (an inherited disease in which red blood cells die easily and regular blood transfusions are required) found that fewer transfusions were required in 50% of patients when wheatgrass juice was taken daily, although in 50% there was no benefit. These observations are interesting, but as the authors themselves point out, the mechanism needs to be proven and additional research carried out before the claims can be properly validated.

“Wheatgrass helps prevent and can cure cancer”

Inconclusive evidence for prevention, none for cure.

Test tube and animal studies have shown that wheatgrass extract works against gene mutations, but there's no certainty that the same effect would happen in humans. Previously it was speculated that this effect was due to wheatgrass containing chlorophyll, but more recently it's been proposed that it's a result of the antioxidant activity of the flavonoids it contains.

Flavonoids are a group of naturally occurring compounds found in many fruits and vegetables, and there's evidence that eating fruit and vegetables

can help reduce the risk of cancer. But you can't automatically draw the conclusion that drinking wheatgrass juice will also contribute towards this protective effect, as the laboratory studies were performed on an extract of wheatgrass, not wheatgrass juice itself.

There's nothing to substantiate claims that wheatgrass can help 'dissolve tumours'. This type of claim could be dangerous if someone were to substitute wheatgrass juice for their regular treatment.

“Wheatgrass gets rid of bad breath and body odour”

The evidence isn't for wheatgrass itself, and it's mixed.

Chlorophyll has been claimed to act as a deodoriser and was particularly popular in the 1940s as an aid to reducing the odour from infected surface wounds and ulcers. To this day, plants with a high chlorophyll content like parsley and wheatgrass are often recommended as aids to reduce problems such as bad breath and body odour.

In more recent years, just a few studies have been conducted looking at this property of chlorophyll, with mixed results. Some case reports found that chlorophyllin — a derivative of chlorophyll — decreased urinary and faecal odours in incontinent patients. However, a placebo-controlled trial found it to be no more effective than the placebo at reducing faecal odour.

“Wheatgrass juice is perfectly safe”

As far as the evidence goes, there's minimal risk to your health from taking wheatgrass juice.

There's a small chance of bacterial contamination from the soil in the tray where it's growing if care isn't taken when it's cut for juicing. But these days a lot of wheatgrass is grown hydroponically (without soil) so this risk is eliminated.

If you have too much, nausea and diarrhoea are potential side effects. But if you've ever had a shot of wheatgrass you'll know that it's an unusual taste, and the chances of over-consuming seem highly unlikely.

All in all, throwing back a shot of wheatgrass juice can make an interesting alternative to your morning espresso and provide a few nutrients along the way, but don't hold your breath for anything more.

THE EASY WAY?

As well as the freshly juiced shot, you can now buy wheatgrass juice in a variety of forms that cash in on the craze while avoiding the hassle of juicing it yourself or going to a cafe.

However, shelf-stable wheatgrass juice shots and wheatgrass extract added to other juices (sometimes only in very small amounts) may differ in potentially important ways from the fresh stuff.

The bottom line is there's really no decent proof wheatgrass juice is worth forking out for, fresh or otherwise.



Confectionery-free checkouts

A recent survey by The Parents Jury found that more than 70% of parents surveyed would consider changing supermarkets if a rival supermarket implemented a 50% confectionery-free checkout policy. The Parents Jury is a group of parents who want to improve the food and physical activity environment for children in Australia. It's supported by Diabetes Australia (Vic), The Cancer Council of Australia and the Australasian Society for the Study of Obesity.

Some people may think parents just have to say no, but as most parents know, shopping with kids is a nightmare at the best of times, let alone topping it off with a tantrum at the checkout. It's this psychology the supermarkets count on to make a quick impulse sale.

The Parents Jury is calling for supermarkets to replace confectionery at checkouts with healthier options or non-food items, an initiative we'd also like to see.



GREEN TEA WITH YOUR WHISKY, SIR?

It may seem like a clash of flavours to us, or even just the ruin of a good whisky, but it's apparently the latest tittle in China. Does it put a healthy spin on a drink at your local?

Keep eating fish!

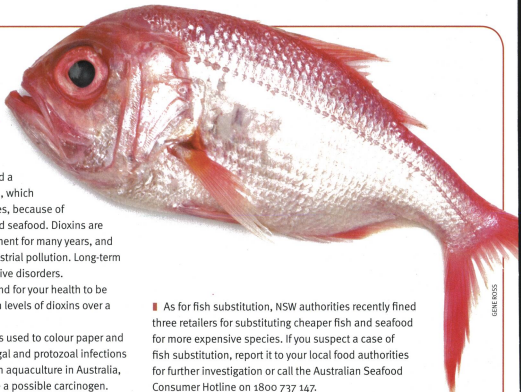
Dioxins, fish substitution, malachite green contamination — all recent issues concerning the seafood industry, especially in NSW, that may have put a dampener on your Friday night fish and chip fest. What does it all mean?

■ In February, the NSW government placed a ban on commercial fishing in Port Jackson, which includes Sydney Harbour and its tributaries, because of elevated levels of dioxins found in fish and seafood. Dioxins are chemicals that can remain in the environment for many years, and in this case probably originated from industrial pollution. Long-term exposure can cause cancer and reproductive disorders.

The ban is a precautionary measure, and for your health to be affected you'd need to be exposed to high levels of dioxins over a long period.

■ Malachite green is a synthetic dye that's used to colour paper and fabric, but it can also be used to treat fungal and protozoal infections in fish and fish eggs. It's banned for use in aquaculture in Australia, as studies on animals have shown it to be a possible carcinogen. Fish with any malachite green residue is banned from being sold in Australia by the regulator, Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ).

A survey conducted by FSANZ in 2005 found evidence of malachite green in both domestically farmed and imported fish. Further investigation is under way into the extent of usage in Australia, and the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service will be conducting random testing of imported seafood.



■ As for fish substitution, NSW authorities recently fined three retailers for substituting cheaper fish and seafood for more expensive species. If you suspect a case of fish substitution, report it to your local food authorities for further investigation or call the Australian Seafood Consumer Hotline on 1800 737 147.

So what does all this mean — should you stop eating fish? No: precautions are being taken against contaminants, and it's a nutritious food that can be a valuable source of omega-3 fatty acids. Pregnant women and children need to watch which fish varieties they eat due to mercury levels (see CHOICE, August 2005 — in summary, they need to avoid eating much sea perch, catfish, swordfish, broadbill or marlin). But most people will still be doing themselves a favour by including fish in their diet at least two or three times a week.



Beyond the cheese toasty ...

MORE THAN A SANDWICH

Once considered the staple diet of poor students everywhere, toasted sandwiches have undergone something of a gourmet revolution. No longer confined to the traditional cheese toasty, some of these new sandwich presses can toast focaccia, panini and Turkish breads, as well as make melts and open sandwiches.

The main difference between these new sandwich presses and the traditional jaffle maker is that a jaffle maker seals the edges of the sandwich and cuts it down the middle, while a sandwich press just presses and heats it.

And with most presses quick and easy to use, they're a perfect way to liven up your lunch without leaving your own kitchen.

THE TEST

We first tested how well the sandwich presses toasted sliced white bread with a cheese and tomato filling, and assessed how easy they were to use and clean.

Of the 11 models tested, eight did a good enough job of toasting the sandwiches, while the remaining three (the TIFFANY two-slice and the TIFFANY and MAXIM four-slice models) performed poorly, producing unevenly cooked sandwiches with large untoasted areas.

We then tried toasting focaccia and panini breads, and found that our top performers with regular sliced bread also cooked these very well. You don't need to look for a 'panini press' in particular to toast panini — some of the regular sandwich presses did just as well.

As well as toasting the bread evenly, they warmed up the fillings to a good temperature (and even managed to warm — but not cook — smoked salmon).

Raisin bread, brioche and other breads with a higher sugar content will toast more quickly than more savoury breads. Breads with a hard crust, such as panini, on the other hand, take longer to toast than regular bread. If you like your filling piping hot, we found you could leave the bread for toasting longer than the recommended time without burning it.

All the presses were relatively easy to use except the TIFFANY two-slice model — see *What about the rest?*, page 28.

IN A NUTSHELL

■ **On test:** Seven two-slice and four four-slice sandwich presses. Our results show big differences in how well they performed.

■ **Four-slice presses** are good for families and can accommodate different types of bread more easily, but don't toast as evenly as the best two-slice presses.

What to look for

- Models with cord storage under the bottom plate will help keep your kitchen bench tidy and dangling power cords away from little hands.
- A glass top or painted surface are the easiest to keep clean but if you want stainless steel, a polished finish is easier to clean than a brushed one.
- If you like melts or open sandwiches you'll need a model with a manually adjustable top plate, which allows you to lock the top toasting plate just above the bread, like a grill (model details in the table).
- A storage latch that can lock the top and bottom plates together makes it easier to carry and store the sandwich press (model details in the table).
- All the tested models have non-stick plates, a floating hinge to allow the press to adjust to the height of the sandwich, and power and element on/off indicators. None of them has a temperature control.

What to buy

Models in the *What to Buy* list are profiled in rank order.

TWO-SLICE MODELS

RUSSELL HOBBS REFLECTIONS PANINI PRESS 10810

Price: \$100

Our overall top performer makes nicely cooked sandwiches, with the bread evenly toasted. It's one of the easiest presses to use and clean and has a glass finish on the top. But it's the only model tested without a latch to lock the top and bottom plates together for storage. It also doesn't have anywhere to store the cord or an adjustable top plate for making melts.



Russell Hobbs

BLACK & DECKER SANDWICH & PANINI PRESS BSP101

Price: \$60

Produces nicely cooked sandwiches with the bread evenly toasted, and is very easy to use.

BREVILLE SANDWICH PRESS SG620

Price: \$60

This press is fast to heat up and also makes nicely cooked, evenly toasted sandwiches. It's very easy to use.



Black & Decker

FOUR-SLICE MODELS

BREVILLE MAXI SANDWICH PRESS SG820

Price: \$90

Makes good sandwiches but doesn't toast as evenly as the top two-slice models. It's one of the easiest presses to use.

SUNBEAM CAFÉ PRESS GR8400

Price: \$80

Makes good sandwiches but doesn't toast as evenly as the top two-slice models. It's also one of the easiest models to use, but it doesn't have an adjustable top plate to make open melts.



Breville Maxi

WHAT ABOUT THE REST?

■ The **BELLE** Stainless Steel Sandwich Press and **SUNBEAM** Compact Café Grill two-slice models both performed well, but didn't toast the bread quite as evenly as the top three two-slice models. Still, you'd probably be pretty happy with either, and they're cheaper than the top three. (The **SUNBEAM** doesn't have an adjustable top plate for making melts.)

■ The **KAMBROOK** Compact Sandwich Press two-slice is OK for ordinary sliced bread, but isn't recommended if you like toasting larger breads like focaccia as they won't fully fit onto the small plates. It also doesn't have an adjustable top plate.

■ The **TIFFANY** 4 Slice and 2 Slice Sandwich Presses and **MAXIM** Kitchenpro four-slice all toast bread unevenly, leaving large uncooked areas. The **TIFFANY** 2 Slice also has a design fault that means the top plate doesn't stay upright while you're putting food on the bottom plate. This is very dangerous as the hot plate can easily fall on your hands.



Breville Sandwich Press



Sunbeam Café Press

PERFORMANCE

Brand / model (in rank order)

TWO SLICES

RUSSELL HOBBS Reflections Panini Press 10810

BLACK & DECKER Sandwich & Panini Press BSP101

BREVILLE Sandwich Press SG620

BELLE Stainless Steel Sandwich Press SP2

SUNBEAM Compact Café Grill GR8210

KAMBROOK Compact Sandwich Press KP500

TIFFANY 2 Slice Sandwich Press SP2

FOUR SLICES

BREVILLE Maxi Sandwich Press SG820

SUNBEAM Café Press GR8400

TIFFANY 4 Slice Sandwich Press SP4

MAXIM Kitchenpro SP 038

	1 Overall score (%)	2 Toasting score (%)	3 Ease of use score (%)	4 Heat-up time (min:sec)
RUSSELL HOBBS Reflections Panini Press 10810	81	80	83	4:30
BLACK & DECKER Sandwich & Panini Press BSP101	80	80	80	4:20
BREVILLE Sandwich Press SG620	80	80	80	2:30
BELLE Stainless Steel Sandwich Press SP2	73	70	80	2:40
SUNBEAM Compact Café Grill GR8210	72	70	78	2:00
KAMBROOK Compact Sandwich Press KP500	65	60	75	2:00
TIFFANY 2 Slice Sandwich Press SP2	40	40	40	2:10
BREVILLE Maxi Sandwich Press SG820	74	70	83	3:20
SUNBEAM Café Press GR8400	74	70	83	2:40
TIFFANY 4 Slice Sandwich Press SP4	53	40	83	2:30
MAXIM Kitchenpro SP 038	52	40	80	2:15

Cleaning tips

Sandwich presses should be cleaned after each use to prevent a build-up of baked-on foods. All the models we tested have a non-stick coating and are relatively easy to clean.

- After unplugging the sandwich press, wipe it with a damp sponge and soapy water.
- Don't use steel wool or scouring pads as they'll damage the non-stick coating.
- For stubborn stains brush cooking oil onto the plates and leave it for five minutes, then wipe them with a damp cloth.
- Generally presses with a ribbed plate, such as the **SUNBEAM Compact Café Grill**, are more difficult to clean than those with a smooth surface.

For people with a disability

The models in the *What to buy* list, except the **RUSSELL HOBBS**, are all OK for people with a disability, but are a little heavy and more difficult to pick up than some others.

Of the other two-slice models the **BELLE** and **KAMBROOK** are comparatively lightweight and easy to lift, but their handle and lid are the same colour, which might mean people with sight problems have difficulty using them.

FILLING SUGGESTIONS

- For a breakfast treat place a fried egg on the base of an English muffin, top with a slice of cheese and finish with cooked bacon strips — grill till they turn crunchy. (For models with adjustable top plate only).
- Rub the surface of the two bread slices with a sliced garlic clove. Top one with thinly sliced chargrilled lamb, finely sliced red onion, hummus and fruit chutney. Put the second slice on top.
- Combine chopped barbecued chicken, finely diced onion and shredded tasty cheese in a bowl. Spread the bread with

sweet chilli or barbecue sauce, top with the chicken mixture and place the second slice on top.

And for dessert.....

- Spread cream cheese over a slice of crusty bread and sprinkle with bittersweet chocolate. Place another slice of bread on top. Cook until golden and heated through and serve with ice cream.
- Spread mascarpone cheese over a slice of crusty bread. Fill with sliced strawberries and raspberries and drizzle with honey. Place another slice of bread on top. Cook until golden and heated through.



FEATURES			SPECIFICATIONS		
Adjustable top plate height	Storage latch	Cord storage	Warranty (years)	Manufacturer / distributor	Price (\$)*
			2	Salton	100
✓	✓	✓	2	Mistral	60
✓	✓	✓	1	HWI Electrical	60
✓	✓	✓	1	SAAB Appliances	30 (A)
✓	✓	✓	1	Sunbeam	50
✓	✓	✓	1	HWI Electrical	40
✓	✓	✓	2	GAF Control	40
✓	✓	✓	1	HWI Electrical	90
✓	✓	✓	1	Sunbeam	80
✓	✓	✓	2	GAF Control	50
✓	✓	✓	1	Maxim Housewares	50

* Prices are recommended retail, as provided by manufacturers in February 2006.

(A) As more than one distributor handles this product, prices may vary.

1 Overall score

This is made up of:

- Toasting performance: 70%
- Ease of use score: 30%

2 Toasting score

We assessed how well the sandwich maker could produce a target brownness and evenness over both sides of the bread using sliced white bread with cheese and tomato filling. While we also tested different breads and fillings, the white bread proved to be a good indicator of a press's performance with other types of bread too.

3 Ease of use score

The following aspects were weighted equally:

- Ease of cleaning exterior.

- Ease of cleaning hotplates.

- Ease of loading/unloading food.

- Versatility in accommodating different types and sizes of bread.

4 Heat-up time

The time it took for the sandwich press to heat up in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions (until the 'ready' light comes on or goes off).

5 Features

See *What to look for*, page 27, for an explanation of the features in the table.

DON'T WAIT — INSULATE!

Is one type of insulation better than another?

Despairing about your over-the-top energy bills or another winter huddled next to a bar heater? It's time to consider insulation. When properly installed, it not only helps keep your home a comfortable temperature all year round, but can also save you money on heating and cooling costs, and should therefore pay for itself over a relatively short period of time.

By using less electricity and gas, you'll also cut down on harmful greenhouse emissions. Some insulation can even provide soundproofing, while other types can help prevent condensation.

HOW IT WORKS

Heat always travels towards cooler areas. Insulation works by reducing the amount of heat entering from outside your home when it's hot, and trapping warmth inside when it's cold outside.

Heat is transferred in three ways:

■ **Conduction** is the direct transfer of heat through solid materials. A metal poker put into a fire is heated through conduction.

■ **Convection** involves the transport of heat via the movement of gases or liquids. You'll feel convection taking place in a two-storey house — the heat rises from the lower floor to the top.

■ **Radiation** is the transfer of heat across space from a warm body to a cold one — an example is the heat emitted by a bar radiator.

Insulation materials work by affecting some or all of the above three ways of heat transfer. The highest percentage of heat transfer occurs via the roof and ceiling, so it's most important to insulate here.

MATERIALS

Insulation can be grouped into three categories: bulk, reflective and composite, which combines reflective and bulk materials.

■ **Bulk insulation** contains fibres that trap tiny pockets of air, which resist heat flow because these air pockets are poor conductors. Types of bulk insulation available are glasswool (fibreglass), rockwool, natural wool (often mixed with polyester) and polyester, all of which come as batts or blankets. Polystyrene boards may also be used as insulation, mainly in walls and cathedral (sloping/raked) ceilings.

Another type of bulk insulation is loose fill. It's made of shredded or granulated material that's pumped into the ceiling space by a machine. Some examples are cellulose fibre (made from recycled paper), natural wool and granulated rockwool.

IN A NUTSHELL

■ Insulating your roof or ceiling will help keep your home a pleasant temperature, save you money on energy bills, and pay for itself over time.

■ Several different materials are available — the best one for you depends on your particular circumstances and preferences.

■ With non-renewable energy resources dwindling, insulation is even more crucial nowadays, and mandatory if you're building a new home — see Mandatory energy ratings, far right.

■ **Reflective insulation** dramatically reduces infrared radiant heat transfer from a hot surface to a cooler one. Reflective insulation is available as foil sheets laminated onto paper, concertina-style foil or as a multi-cell foil product (silver batts) — a structure made of two to four layers of foil with air spaces in between. To reflect heat, foil insulation needs to face an air space of at least 25 mm.

■ **Composite materials** combine elements of the two other types. These include batts or blankets with foil backing (foil side facing out) and foil-faced boards.

While manufacturers of each type tend to talk up their product, experts say any insulation is preferable to none, and every material has its place. The product chosen usually depends on personal issues, such as price, whether it's made from recycled material, where the insulation is being installed, or even who's doing the installation.

PROS AND CONS

■ **Glasswool and rockwool batts and blankets:** Glasswool is made largely from recycled glass. The Insulation Council of Australia and New Zealand (ICANZ) says its glasswool is 70% recycled waste glass, and its rockwool about 25% recycled building and slag waste.

Batts are inexpensive, easy to cut and fire-resistant. You can install them yourself, but make sure they don't get compressed or wet, as this will reduce their R-value (thermal resistance; see *R-value — what is it?*, page 32, for more on this important aspect of insulation). You also need to check they're butted together firmly when installed, as gaps will dramatically lower their effectiveness.

Rockwool is denser than glasswool and a better sound absorber, so this may be a good choice if you're looking to reduce noise. However, it's generally more expensive than glasswool.

The International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) has now confirmed there is no evidence to support previous concerns that these products were possibly carcinogenic in a similar way to asbestos: minute particles becoming lodged in the lungs.

Manufacturers also now produce glasswool and rockwool that are more bio-soluble than before, meaning that if you do happen to inhale some fibres, they leave the body more quickly. You'll still need to wear protective clothing to install these products, though, to avoid skin and respiratory irritation (see *DIY*, page 34).

■ **Natural wool** is sold as batts, blankets or loose fill. Experts say wool is a niche product in Australia although it's more popular overseas. Batts are usually wool blended with polyester, which helps them keep their shape. It's recommended you choose batts that

are 70% wool as these are more likely to be fireproof.

In CHOICE tests in 1997, some wool batts failed fire-resistance tests, so ask for assurance that it's been adequately tested, preferably to the more stringent British Standard 5803 part 4. Also check the insulation has been treated to permanently resist insects that can breed in unprotected wool insulation.

Wool is usually more expensive than other insulation. If used as a loose fill it must be thoroughly scoured and treated with insect repellent and fire retardant.

■ **Cellulose fibre** is made from pulverised recycled paper, and is a loose fill that must be installed professionally. It's the cheapest bulk insulation to buy and install, but can only be used in roof and ceiling spaces. It's a good option if your roof space is difficult to access.

Cellulose fibre can be dusty, so you need to put in barriers to prevent it falling down through exhaust fans, vents and the like. Some manufacturers spray it in with a sealer. Cellulose fibre is treated with borax and boric acid to make it fire and insect-proof.

The other issue with cellulose fibre is settling. According to the Australian standard, the R-value any insulation product claims should be the one it achieves in the long term, so a reputable installer will quote the R-value of the product when it has settled. (See *Don't get ripped off*, page 34)

■ **Boards (extruded polystyrene or expanded polystyrene)** Extruded polystyrene keeps the air in and water out, while expanded polystyrene isn't water-resistant. Boards are useful especially if space is limited. They have to be installed between non-combustible surfaces, such as plasterboard, reflective foil or brickwork.

■ **Polyester fibres** (including recycled PET bottles, such as soft-drink bottles) can also be made into

Mandatory energy ratings

From July 2006 the Australian Building Codes Board (ABCB), which oversees the building of new homes, is updating its energy efficiency provisions. These will require new buildings to have a minimum five-star energy rating, which means a new building must reach certain standards for environmental performance. This mandatory rating will be part of the Building Code of Australia (BCA) from 2006.

The ABCB has divided Australia into eight different climate zones, and the level of insulation and other energy requirements will depend on which one your home is built in.

While the ABCB is made up of representatives for all states, some states may decide to use their own provisions. For example, Victoria has its own five-star requirements, and NSW has a system called BASIX (the Building Sustainability Index), an online assessment tool for checking the energy efficiency of new homes.

Houses undergoing major renovations may also be required to follow these regulations — check with your state's energy department.

Table 1. WHERE TO USE DIFFERENT INSULATION PRODUCTS

Insulating material	Flat ceilings / pitched roofs	Cathedral or raked ceilings	Timber floors	Suspended concrete slabs	Concrete slab edges	Full masonry walls	Framed walls
Glasswool batts or blankets	✓	✓	✓				✓
Rockwool batts or blankets	✓	✓	✓				✓
Glasswool / rockwool — foil attached	✓	✓					
Natural wool batts or blankets	✓	✓	✓				✓
Polyester batts or blankets	✓	✓	✓				✓
Cellulose fibre	✓	✓					
Granulated rockwool	✓	✓				✓	✓
Natural wool — loose fill	✓	✓					
Reflective foil	✓	✓	✓				✓
Concertina foil batts			✓				✓
Multi-cell foil batts		✓	✓				✓
Extruded polystyrene (styrofoam)		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Expanded polystyrene (EPS)		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Expanded polystyrene — foil attached		✓					✓

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R-value — what is it?

The R-value of a material describes its thermal resistance — how much the material inhibits the transfer of heat. The higher the R-value, the more effective the level of insulation. With bulk materials, the thickness of the product is the key factor in determining its R-value (see Table 2, right).

The R-value you'll need depends on your particular climate. See Table 3: *Climate and R-values*, page 33, or ask your local council what the appropriate R-value for your area is.

R-values can be measured depending on the direction of heat flow (upward or downward). They're known as 'up R-values' (resistance to upward heat flow, also called winter R-values) and 'down R-values' (resistance to downward heat flow, also known as summer R-values). Foil-insulated systems tend to have higher down R-values. In hot, humid climates where houses are naturally ventilated, high down values and lower up values are appropriate for roofs and ceilings.

Last year the ACCC investigated the claim that some companies were overstating the R-value of their products. The ACCC says two manufacturers of polyester insulation batts accepted that they may have overstated the rating of some of their materials' R-values. Since May 2005, the Building Code of Australia has required all insulation materials to comply with the Australian and New Zealand Standard 4859.1. This means they'll need to be tested by an independent company in their retail form when they've been compressed for packing, rather than immediately after production. Table 2 tells you what thickness to look for in various insulation materials for some common R-values.

There are two ways in which R-values are listed. System R-value includes the insulation value of air spaces and building materials working in conjunction with the insulation material when it's installed

batts and blankets. Polyester is a good choice if you're insulating a space you'll go into occasionally, such as an attic, as it doesn't create extra dust or have loose fibres. It also doesn't cause any irritation during installation.

■ Reflective foils: Foil can cut out 95% of radiant heat, so it's a particularly good material for keeping a house cool in summer or in a climate that's hot much of the year. Reflective foil can be installed under the floor, in the roof construction or the walls of a house.

It's possible to install silver batts yourself, but keep in mind there needs to be a still air space of at least 25 mm below the foil in order for it to be effective.

Foil sarking also provides a condensation barrier and can act as a

in the building according to the manufacturer's specifications. Product R-value is the R-value of the product on its own. When comparing prices be sure to compare products with similar-type ratings.

As single-sheet foils have no R-value as a material on their own, they're measured and labelled according to their system R-value.

Table 2. INSULATION THICKNESS FOR SOME SPECIFIC R-VALUES

Material	THICKNESS REQUIRED TO ACHIEVE	
	R = 2.5 (mm)*	R = 3.5 (mm)*
Glasswool batt (low density)	130	180
Glasswool batt (medium density)	100	140
Polyester batt (low density)	160	220
Polyester batt (medium density)	110	160
Sheep's wool batt (low density)	150	210
Sheep's wool batt (medium density)	110	160
Sheep's wool (loose-fill, low density)	170	230
Sheep's wool (loose-fill, medium density)	110	160
Rockwool batt	90	130
Rockwool (loose-fill)	90	130
Cellulose fibre (loose-fill)	100	140

Source: CSIRO, Building, Construction & Engineering (modified).
* Rounded to the nearest 10 mm.

(A) (See Table 3, right.) The zero figure isn't intended to suggest that no insulation is required. It indicates that insulation to reduce heat loss may not be cost-effective and can even contribute to overheating in homes without adequate sun control. In these situations use insulation that prevents heat gain without unduly restricting heat loss (high down values, low up values).

Reproduced with kind permission from Your Home Technical Manual: www.greenhouse.gov.au/yourhome/technical/fs16a.htm#levels.

'second skin' under tiles, protecting ceilings and walls from leaks and cracks. Make sure there are no tears in foils — they decrease its performance as a vapour barrier. Surface dust can also decrease the foil's R-value, which is why it must always be installed with the reflective surface facing downwards.

See Table 1, left, for where the different insulation products would typically be used.

BEFORE YOU INSULATE

"One company's rep was only interested in selling his material and derided all other types. He wouldn't divulge the cash price until I categorically agreed to seal the deal by paying cash ... I decided not to deal with them again."

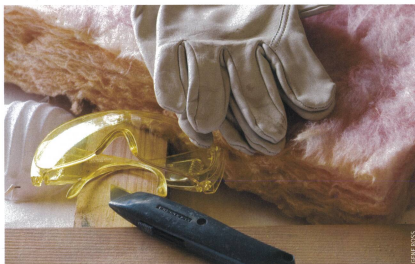
John and Carmel, Queensland.

"I found ringing insulation supply companies confusing, as each tended to push a particular brand or type of insulation, rather than providing a well-rounded comparison of what's available. Some told me R3.5 would be OK for my area, when I know R4 is recommended for this climate."

Bronwyn, Braidwood, NSW.

Table 3. CLIMATE AND R-VALUES

CLIMATE TYPE AND EXAMPLE LOCATIONS	RECOMMENDED R-VALUES	
	Roof / ceiling	Wall
COOL TEMPERATE AND ALPINE		
Melbourne	3.0	1.5
Mount Gambier, SA	3.0	1.5–2.0
Ballarat, Vic	3.5	1.5–2.0
Canberra	3.5	1.5–2.0
Hobart	3.5	1.5–2.0
Thredbo, NSW	4.0	1.5–2.0
HOT HUMID AND HOT DRY		
Cairns, Qld	0–3.5 (A)	0–1.5 (A)
Townsville, Qld	0–3.5 (A)	0–1.5 (A)
Broome, WA	0–4 (A)	0–2 (A)
Darwin	0–4 (A)	0–2 (A)
Marble Bar, WA	0–4 (A)	0–2 (A)
Mount Isa, Qld	0–4 (A)	0–2 (A)
Tennant Creek, NT	0–4 (A)	0–2 (A)
TEMPERATE AND WARM HUMID		
Brisbane	1.5–2.5	1.0
Perth	1.5–3.0	1.5
Sydney	1.5–3.0	1.5
Alice Springs, NT	1.5–4.0	1.5–2.0
Bourke, NSW	1.5–4.0	1.5–2.0
Adelaide	2.0–3.0	1.5



"The tradespeople who installed our insulation were excellent. They worked as long as weather and light permitted and cleaned up after themselves. They were also very helpful regarding the possum in our roof and other non-standard inclusions, and cleaning out the ceiling space."

Christine, Sydney.

Judging from some subscribers' reports about installation, expect anything from a fantastic to a horrendous experience. Here's what to look for before you leap:

■ Be clear about what you're trying to achieve. For example, the major cause of a hot home could be unshaded windows, so installing shading will be just as important as insulation.

■ Consider where you're going to insulate — in existing homes, it's usually the ceiling, but you can insulate under suspended timber floors. Although some experts recommend wall insulation for existing homes, it's difficult and relatively expensive and usually only occurs during construction or a major renovation. If you're thinking of building, see *Mandatory energy ratings*, page 31, for regulations governing the energy efficiency of new buildings.

■ Next, decide which insulation you're going to use (see *Pros and cons*, page 31, and Table 1, above left). If you decide on loose fill, you'll need to have the insulation professionally done; if you want to do it yourself you'll have to choose batts (see *DIY*, page 34, for more).

■ Check what R-value is recommended for the area you live in, and that you can get that value in the material you're thinking of using.

■ Ask about the price per square metre of the insulation you've chosen — this can vary, so be prepared to shop around.

■ Check your chosen product is accredited to the Australian and New Zealand Standard 4859.1. Ask the supplier to show you any test certificates or performance guarantees they have for the product, as well as the product's fire and pest resistance.



Multi-cell foil, also known as silver batts.



Loose fill has to be professionally installed.

(The body that tests insulation is called BRANZ — Building Research Australia and New Zealand.)

■ Ensure water can't get into the roof you're insulating, as moisture damages some insulation materials' performance. If it does get very wet, experts recommend you remove it and have new insulation put in.

One reader told us her laundry ceiling fell in due to the weight of water from a pipe leaking into the insulation. While uncommon, it does happen with some materials, so check your roof space occasionally for leaks, especially after a storm.

■ Have an electrician check your wiring to make sure it can be safely covered by insulation, or advise how to work around it.

■ Finally, some parts of the building structure (such as ceiling joists or steel frames) may have a lower R-value than the material

placed between them, so higher levels of insulation need to be added around those areas. Insulation strips can be inserted between the joist or frame and the roof lining to reduce thermal loss.

DON'T GET RIPPED OFF

"After I had silver batts installed, I applied a highly scientific method to check their effectiveness — I climbed on my ladder and put my hand to the ceiling

to feel if it was cold and it was! And it's stayed cold over the years."

Louise, Cleveland, Queensland.

"When [the contractors] had left for the day I got into my roof cavity and found the batts around the manhole properly laid, but as I got further away towards the roof edges there were gaps where batts should have been, and right at the edges there were no batts at all."

Neville, Singleton, NSW.

■ With all insulation, there should be no gaps except around hot objects such as downlighting and gas flues.

■ Experts advise you to get into the roof yourself after your insulation has been installed and check the job has been done properly. The exception is when you've had loose fill installed that's higher than the ceiling joists.

■ **Loose fill:** Loose fill can settle over time, so you need to ensure you get what you pay for. Talk to your installer — if they claim it won't settle, ask for a written guarantee. If they admit to a certain amount of settling you can ask for the installation of more material to compensate. For instance, if the R-value is achieved at a depth of 100 mm, they may install 110 mm. However, this may mean the material will cover the ceiling joists (the usual joist height is 100 mm) until it settles. This could make walking around the roof dangerous. The other option is to ask for a top-up in, say, six to 12 months' time.

■ If you find that an insulation job has been poorly or incompletely done, you're not obliged to pay until problems have been rectified.

■ Go to your state's department of fair trading or building regulatory bodies if you're unhappy with the work done.

DIY

"My husband installed wool batts... they were light, easy to lay and piece into hard-to-get-to spaces and didn't itch when in contact with skin."

Carolyn, Beverley, WA.

"I've done two homes with two layers of sisalation (foils) — a very easy job, and cheap."

Richard, Brisbane.

"It's quite difficult moving around the ceiling — don't take on this job unless you're fit and healthy."

Michael, Darwin.

The most commonly self-installed materials are batts. You'll find installation instructions on the packaging or the manufacturer's literature. When installing rockwool or glasswool batts you must wear a dustmask, goggles, gloves, long-sleeved shirt and closed shoes, as these materials can cause itching and respiratory irritation.

In fact you should really wear protective clothing when installing any insulation to avoid respiratory irritation from dust in the roof space. ■

More tips for an energy-efficient home

■ **Draughtproofing:** Make sure doors and windows are properly sealed — you can buy draught excluders or window seals very cheaply. Seal your chimney with a damper. Avoid installing downlights — besides using a lot of energy, they penetrate the ceiling and insulation, causing heat loss.

■ **Shade:** Keep your home cool in hot weather by shading the windows that directly receive sun (north, east and west-facing windows). External awnings block more heat than internal blinds (because the heat's already inside by then). You can also plant deciduous trees near the windows.

■ **Ventilation:** Ceiling fans are much cheaper than air conditioning and have less impact environmentally, though they don't cool the air, only move it about to produce a breeze. If you have air con, try to use it only on really hot or humid days and have it zoned, so you can turn it off in the areas of the house you're not using. If you live in a dry area of the country evaporative coolers are effective (although unsuitable during water shortages).

■ For more information on energy efficiency, go to the 'Your Home' guide at www.greenhouse.gov.au/yourhome/index.htm

COULD DO BETTER

New isn't always better — some first-time tested brands were disappointing.

Electric fridges for the home have been around for almost a century, during which time there've been many improvements — and not just in style. So you'd think that by now manufacturers would have managed to get a fridge/freezer's basic function right — maintaining a good range of temperatures consistently and uniformly in both compartments all through the year.

However, many fridges nowadays still don't provide anywhere near ideal temperature control. More than half the 12 fridges in our latest test had problems in the all-important temperature management department.

NEW ON TEST

Among the fridges tested for this updated report were two brands we hadn't tested before (**BOSCH** and **CONIA**). Unfortunately, all three models from these brands were disappointing.

Like the other smaller fridges in the test, the **CONIA CF330** had problems with temperature management. It also used much more energy than claimed (see right).

The two **BOSCH** fridges (**Intelligent Frost Free 40** and **44**) were let down on many fronts. These comparatively cheap fridges (for their respective sizes) scored lowest of all models tested in each size bracket (the table, page 38, has details). In particular, both had problems with large temperature fluctuations, and the larger of the two also used much more energy than claimed.

TEMPERATURE TROUBLES

A fridge should maintain relatively steady temperatures in both its fresh-food and freezer compartments when the compressor cycles on and off. While fluctuations of a few degrees are acceptable in a freezer colder than -18°C , larger fluctuations, especially in a warmer freezer, can affect the quality of sensitive foods such as ice cream.

More than half the 12 fridges in this test had problems with large temperature fluctuations, with



GENE BOSS

four scoring just 20% or even less in this important test: the **CONIA CF330**, **FISHER & PAYKEL E249T**, **WHIRLPOOL 6WRI27N** and **BOSCH Intelligent Frost Free 40**.

ENERGY EFFICIENCY

The new Minimum Energy Performance Standards (MEPS 2005) that all fridges sold in Australia must meet have now been in effect for more than a year. And according to their energy labels, all the newly tested fridges comply with the requirements.

However, on the basis of our measured energy consumption, some fridges used much more energy than claimed, notably the **CONIA CF330** (36% more), the **BOSCH Intelligent Frost Free 44** (20% more) and **WHIRLPOOL 6WRI27N** (16% more). **BOSCH** and **WHIRLPOOL** are looking into this.

In contrast, more than half the new fridges tested scored particularly well for energy consumption and used even less energy than allowed.

IN A NUTSHELL

■ On test: 12 new fridges, bringing the total we can report on to 39.

■ More than half the newly tested fridges have temperature management problems.

■ Based on our measurements, some fridges use much more energy than claimed.

WHAT TO BUY

This list includes the best fridges in each size range; where possible we've included both top (T) and bottom (B) freezers.

200–299 L

None of the tested fridges in this size range scored well enough to be recommended; all three are particularly poor at temperature management. Manufacturers seem to be putting their best technology into larger models. So you're probably better off buying a slightly larger model if you have room for it.

300–375 L

FISHER & PAYKEL Elegance E372B (B)	\$1449
FISHER & PAYKEL Tasman E331T (T)	\$1019
SAMSUNG Cool n' Cool SRL316NW (B)	\$899
WESTINGHOUSE RJ362V (T)	\$1009

376–450 L

WESTINGHOUSE Virtuoso RJ425V (T)	\$1319
New FISHER & PAYKEL Tasman E381T (T)	\$1179
FISHER & PAYKEL Elegance E440T (T)	\$1549
WESTINGHOUSE Virtuoso RJ395V (T)	\$1159
FISHER & PAYKEL Tasman E442B (B)	\$1609

These are the best, but there are more good fridges in this size range — see the table, page 38.

451–525 L

FISHER & PAYKEL Elegance E521T (T)	\$1799
WESTINGHOUSE Virtuoso RJ525V (T)	\$1689
ELECTROLUX Kelvinator NB510J (B)	\$1639
FISHER & PAYKEL Elegance E522B (B)	\$1849

MORE THAN 525 L

SAMSUNG Cool Tech Plus SRL550DW (B)	\$1999
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SIDE-BY-SIDE

WESTINGHOUSE WSE6100WA	\$1799
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Profiles

Only one of the newly tested fridges scored well enough to be recommended. For profiles of the other models in the *What to buy* list, see CHOICE, November 2005 (for side-by-side fridges), May 2005, November 2004, November 2003 (side-by-side) and May 2003 (extra-large). You'll also find them in the appropriate month under 'fridges' in the www.choiceextra.com.au index. 

FISHER & PAYKEL TASMAN E381T

Price: \$1179

GOOD POINTS

- Very good fresh food cooling.
- Very energy-efficient.
- Very quiet, compared with other fridges.
- Good temperatures on the 'mid' setting.
- Good temperature uniformity within compartments.
- Handles external temperature changes very well.
- Electronic temperature management with good pushbutton controls makes adjustments simpler.
- Controls allow a good range of temperature combinations between fridge and freezer.
- Good storage versatility.
- An alarm sounds when doors are left open or a fault is detected.

BAD POINTS

- No chiller compartment.



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WHAT ABOUT THE REST OF THE NEW MODELS?

- See *What to buy* (above) for comments on the smallest fridges, and *New on test* (page 35) for the CONIA and two BOSCH models.
- The ELECTROLUX KELVINATOR N360J (364 L) and SIMPSON STM3900WA (393 L) had problems with temperature management.
- At the right price, the FISHER & PAYKEL Elegance E402B (403 L) would be worth considering if you're after this size of fridge with the freezer on the bottom; fresh food cooling was the only area that let it down a little (it takes longer than others to cool down a load).
- The SAMSUNG SR446NW (447 L), LG GR-R491CA (491 L) and SIMPSON SBM5100MA (505 L) might also be worth a second look if you saw them at a good price. They performed comparatively well overall and scored just a little lower than the recommended fridges in their respective size ranges.

How reliable have subscribers found them?

Fridges are comparatively reliable overall. Of the around 8000 subscribers who told us about their fridges (bought in or after 1996) in our latest reliability survey, 10% of fridges had needed repair in the previous 12 months. But there was a sliding scale: only 7% of fridges with a volume of less than 300 L had needed repair, while 13% of people owning one of the bigger models (over 500 L) had to call in the repairer.

The graph on the right shows the results for brands for which we received enough replies to report on (at least 100). The numbers in brackets show the number of responses. A difference of 6% or more between brands is meaningful.

PERCENTAGE NOT NEEDING REPAIR

All fridges (8262)	90
LG (266)	97
Kelvinator (1006)	93
Whirlpool (445)	93
Samsung (186)	92
Westinghouse (2183)	91
Fisher & Paykel (2831)	89
Amana (120)	86
GE (239)	84
Maytag (181)	80

TIP

If you keep your old fridge as a backup or for party use, switching it off when it's not needed could save you \$100–\$150 per year, depending on how old it is.

NOTES FOR THE TABLE OVERLEAF

- # Newly tested models.
- * This is the basic warranty; some manufacturers guarantee some parts for longer. Conditions may apply — check with the retailer.
- ** Prices are recommended retail, provided by manufacturers in March 2006.
- na Not applicable: the doors are side-by-side.
- (A) The refrigerant in this fridge has been increased from 105 g to 110 g since we tested it, but the model number hasn't changed. F&P says the change should improve energy consumption and performance. As both versions will be on the market at the same time, check the name plate inside the door of the fresh-food compartment to see which refrigerant amount your fridge contains.
- (B) These models have new crisper and/or freezer bins since our test. Most F&P fridges come in four price and style ranges: Tasman, Elegance (which have minor cosmetic differences between them), Inax (brushed stainless steel) and Iridium (fingerprint-resistant stainless steel).
- (C) Available with platinum finish, SRL316NP, \$999.
- (D) Discontinued, but limited stock may still be available in some stores.
- (E) Stainless steel model still available: RL423V, \$1589.
- (F) Stainless steel model still available: RL393V, \$1429.
- (G) Available with platinum finish, RL447NTS, \$1399.
- (H) Stainless steel model still available: BL433V, \$1749.
- (I) Available in stainless steel, 6WMV43NS, \$1799.
- (J) Available in stainless steel, KSU405916W, \$1499.
- (K) Available in stainless steel, RL523V, \$2009.
- (L) Available in stainless steel, N8150SL, \$1959.
- (M) Available with titanium finish, GR-R466TA, \$1499.
- (P) Available with platinum finish, SRL503NTS, \$1599.
- (Q) Stainless steel model still available, KSU445916W, \$1599.
- (R) Available with pewter finish, SRL551DP, \$2199.
- (S) 'French door' model — pull-out freezer drawer at the bottom and a fresh-food compartment up top that opens like a side-by-side fridge.
- (T) Available in stainless steel, WSE6100SA, \$2219, and with an ice and water dispenser in white, WSE6070WA,

\$2429, and stainless steel, WSE6070SA, \$2799. Energy use will be slightly higher for models with ice and water dispensers.

(U) Available with pewter finish, SRL5596NP, \$2099.

(V) Chiller was too warm in our tests for optimal storage of highly perishable foods.

(W) With temperature control.

1 Overall score

The overall score is based on performance and ease of use, weighted as follows:

- Ease of use: 20%
- Temperature performance: 40%
- Energy efficiency: 20%
- Crisper freshness: 8%
- Cooling: 12%

Notes 2–9

Go to www.choiceextra.com.au and click on any of the articles under 'Fridges' in the index to see what we tested and measured for these scores (under *Our test*).



10 Claimed volume

The volume claimed by the manufacturer tells you approximately how much air space the fridge has to cool; less space is available for storage, especially in a frost-free freezer compartment. Use the volume columns to get an idea of how big the freezer is compared with the fresh-food compartment, so you can choose a fridge that meets your storage needs.

11 10-year running costs

These are calculated at a rate of 15 cents per kWh. A 10-year period provides a useful indication of the long-term differences between high and low energy usage — and you should be able to expect your fridge to last at least that long.

FOR PEOPLE WITH A DISABILITY

An occupational therapist from the Independent Living Centre (NSW) assessed the 12 fridges in our latest test. Of them, only the FISHER & PAYKEL Tasman E381T (freezer on top) was recommended for people with a vision or cognitive impairment and wheelchair users as well as making it into the general *What to buy* list.

EXTRA INFO

For a general guide to what to look for in a fridge and more information on features and accessories, go to www.choiceextra.com.au and click on any of the articles under 'Fridges' in the index. For a limited time you also have access to our interactive 'compare-a-fridge' tool to help you choose the model that suits you best.



Brand / model (in rank order within groups)	Freezer location	PERFORMANCE						Cooling time (hrs)
		1 Overall score (%)	2 Ease of use score (%)	3 Temperature performance score (%)	4 Energy efficiency score (%)	5 Crisper freshness score (%)	6 Cooling score (%)	
200–299 L								
# WHIRLPOOL 6WR127N	Top	60	69	41	77	80	65	5:42
# CONIA CF330	Top	59	67	45	65	69	74	4:59
# FISHER & PAYKEL E249T (A)	Top	54	63	42	83	40	38	8:02
300–375 L								
FISHER & PAYKEL Elegance E372B (B)	Bottom	76	73	74	84	95	62	5:18
FISHER & PAYKEL Tasman E331T (B)	Top	76	71	68	91	90	78	4:13
SAMSUNG Cool n' Cool SRL316NW (C)	Bottom	74	71	71	85	71	70	4:58
WESTINGHOUSE RJ362V	Top	71	70	64	82	84	67	5:02
# ELECTROLUX KELVINATOR N360J	Top	67	70	52	86	78	70	4:44
WHIRLPOOL 6WMV35NW	Top	65	63	63	92	43	45	6:33
ELECTROLUX KELVINATOR N300J (D)	Top	61	70	40	81	77	69	5:09
376–450 L								
WESTINGHOUSE Virtuoso RJ425V (D) (E)	Top	80	76	81	82	84	80	3:44
# FISHER & PAYKEL Tasman E381T	Top	79	71	77	90	80	81	3:42
FISHER & PAYKEL Elegance E440T (B)	Top	78	76	73	92	73	82	3:33
WESTINGHOUSE Virtuoso RJ395V (D) (F)	Top	78	73	80	79	82	75	4:14
FISHER & PAYKEL Tasman E442B (B)	Bottom	76	76	72	84	92	68	4:40
WESTINGHOUSE RJ422V	Top	75	73	71	86	80	69	4:39
# FISHER & PAYKEL Elegance E402B	Bottom	74	75	72	78	94	59	5:24
# SAMSUNG SR446NW	Top	74	70	73	89	63	66	4:50
WESTINGHOUSE RJ442V (G)	Top	73	73	66	85	83	69	4:37
WESTINGHOUSE Virtuoso BJ435V (D) (H)	Bottom	72	73	71	77	78	63	5:03
ELECTROLUX KELVINATOR NB380J	Bottom	69	67	68	76	76	60	5:26
# SIMPSON STM3900WA	Top	66	70	51	87	74	71	4:33
WHIRLPOOL 6WMV43NW (J)	Top	61	66	51	91	35	54	5:39
# BOSCH Intelligent Frost Free 40 KSU405216W (K)	Top	59	64	43	83	60	67	4:53
451–525 L								
FISHER & PAYKEL Elegance E521T (B)	Top	82	76	80	91	92	78	3:46
WESTINGHOUSE Virtuoso RJ525V (L)	Top	80	79	82	81	80	77	3:52
ELECTROLUX KELVINATOR NB510J (M)	Bottom	75	67	77	80	87	62	4:58
FISHER & PAYKEL Elegance E522B (B)	Bottom	75	76	73	82	92	59	5:07
# LG GR-R491JCA (N)	Top	73	70	74	87	69	56	5:22
WESTINGHOUSE RJ522V	Top	73	76	66	83	80	69	4:28
# SIMPSON SBMS100MA	Bottom	72	70	71	79	87	60	5:07
SAMSUNG SR502NXXA (P)	Top	69	69	61	89	53	76	3:56
# BOSCH Intelligent Frost Free 44 KSU445216W (D) (Q)	Top	64	67	55	79	59	64	4:58
MORE THAN 525 L								
SAMSUNG Cool Tech Plus SRL550DW (R)	Bottom	73	72	64	88	74	79	3:39
LG GR-B218WV (S)	Bottom	66	64	57	81	83	59	4:59
SIDE-BY-SIDE								
WESTINGHOUSE WSE6100WA (T)	LH side	77	73	76	79	76	81	3:26
LG GR-B197WVS	LH side	71	74	62	80	83	77	3:44
SAMSUNG SR5595NTD (U)	LH side	65	75	45	81	82	79	3:34
SAMSUNG SR5535NW	LH side	64	74	45	83	66	78	3:46

Newly tested models.

		FEATURES			SPECIFICATIONS										COSTS	
Claimed / measured energy use (Wh / year)	8 Noise level (dB)				9 Door hinge position	Remove shelves with door at 90°	Measured dimensions (cm, H x W x D)	10 Claimed total volume (L)	10 Claimed volume, fresh food (L)	10 Claimed volume, freezer (L)	Warranty (years)*	Origin	Manufacturer / distributor	11 10-year running costs (\$)	Price (\$)**	
		Chiller	Crisper drawers	Dairy												
6 / 472	40	✓ (V)	1		Rev	✓	170 x 56 x 63	270	206	64	2	India	Whirlpool	708	799	
0 / 570	39		1		R	✓	170 x 58 x 64	267	195	72	2	China	Pebble	855	649	
7 / 408	36		1	✓	Rev		161 x 53 x 58	248	191	57	2	NZ	Fisher & Paykel	612	809	
8 / 481	37		2	✓	R or L		161 x 64 x 70	373	250	123	2	NZ	Fisher & Paykel	722	1449	
7 / 388	36		1	✓	Rev	✓	143 x 64 x 69	329	232	97	2	NZ	Fisher & Paykel	582	1019	
5 / 447	37		1		R		178 x 60 x 66	316	199	117	2	China	Samsung	671	899	
9 / 493	38		1	✓	R or L		164 x 70 x 65	364	273	91	2	Australia	Electrolux	740	1009	
9 / 449	39		1	✓	R or L		164 x 70 x 65	364	273	91	2	Australia	Electrolux	674	1009	
9 / 387	38	✓	1		Rev	✓	167 x 60 x 77	350	270	80	2	Brazil	Whirlpool	581	1099	
4 / 464	44		1	✓	R or L		162 x 61 x 65	303	228	75	2	Australia	Electrolux	696	899	
8 / 523	37		1	✓	R or L		164 x 70 x 71	416	313	103	2	Australia	Electrolux	785	1319	
3 / 424	35		1	✓	Rev	✓	161 x 64 x 70	380	283	97	2	NZ	Fisher & Paykel	636	1179	
6 / 437	36		1	✓	R or L		161 x 69 x 70	447	342	105	2	Australia	Fisher & Paykel	656	1549	
6 / 530	37		1	✓	R or L		172 x 70 x 65	393	302	91	2	Australia	Electrolux	795	1159	
3 / 527	36		2	✓	Rev		170 x 67 x 71	442	307	135	2	Australia	Fisher & Paykel	791	1609	
5 / 477	39		1	✓	R or L		164 x 70 x 71	416	313	103	2	Australia	Electrolux	716	1219	
8 / 561	35		2	✓	R or L		171 x 64 x 70	403	280	123	2	NZ	Fisher & Paykel	842	1549	
2 / 474	38	✓ (V)	1		R	✓	175 x 72 x 71	447	319	128	2	Korea	Samsung	711	1199	
6 / 503	41		1	✓	R or L		172 x 70 x 71	442	339	103	2	Australia	Electrolux	755	1269	
3 / 584	41		1	✓	R or L		172 x 71 x 71	431	300	131	2	Australia	Electrolux	876	1429	
6 / 559	41		1	✓	R or L		172 x 71 x 65	381	267	114	2	Australia	Electrolux	839	1109	
3 / 459	41		1	✓	R or L		172 x 70 x 65	393	302	91	2	Australia	Electrolux	689	1009	
2 / 434	39	✓	1		Rev	✓	175 x 71 x 77	430	325	105	2	Brazil	Whirlpool	651	1299	
1 / 519	35	✓ (V)	1	✓	R, rev	✓	172 x 70 x 68	406	266	140	2	Brazil	BSH	779	1099	
8 / 483	36		2	✓	R or L		170 x 80 x 71	517	400	117	2	Australia	Fisher & Paykel	725	1799	
7 / 590	37		2	✓	R or L		172 x 80 x 71	517	396	121	2	Australia	Electrolux	885	1689	
9 / 602	39		2	✓	R or L		172 x 81 x 71	505	349	156	2	Australia	Electrolux	903	1639	
6 / 597	37		2	✓	R or L		170 x 80 x 71	519	360	159	2	Australia	Fisher & Paykel	896	1849	
0 / 524	35	✓ (V)	2	✓	R	✓	179 x 76 x 72	491	340	151	2	Korea	LG	786	1349	
8 / 569	40		2	✓	R or L		172 x 80 x 71	517	396	121	2	Australia	Electrolux	854	1589	
9 / 616	37		2	✓	R or L		173 x 80 x 71	505	349	156	2	Australia	Electrolux	924	1429	
5 / 503	35	✓ (V)	1		R	✓	175 x 78 x 73	502	349	153	2	Korea	Samsung	755	1399	
4 / 580	35	✓ (V)	1	✓	R, rev		186 x 70 x 68	453	313	140	2	Brazil	BSH	870	1199	
4 / 576	40	✓	1		R		180 x 83 x 73	551	361	190	2	Korea	Samsung	864	1999	
8 / 677	35	✓ (W)	2	✓	(S)		177 x 91 x 71	622	423	199	2	Korea	LG	1016	2699	
7 / 705	41		2	✓	na		176 x 90 x 71	606	357	249	2	Australia	Electrolux	1058	1799	
80 / 675	37	✓ (W)	1	✓	na		176 x 90 x 68	581	353	228	2	Korea	LG	1013	1899	
82 / 670	37		2	✓	na		176 x 91 x 68	596	368	228	2	Korea	Samsung	1005	1999	
02 / 605	36		2	✓	na		173 x 86 x 67	535	316	219	2	Korea	Samsung	908	1799	

Four-wheel drive?

\$200–\$400 buys a better stroller than \$1300.

Maclaren
Vogue
Storm



■ On test: 10 four-wheel layback (fully reclinable) strollers ranging from \$200 to \$1299.

■ None failed our durability tests, but four, including the most expensive model, failed at least one safety test.

■ Also tested: a compact, fold-up, three-wheel stroller designed for travelling — see page 43.

Childcare
Discovery



Love n Care
Victory II



Jeep Grand
Cherokee Limited



PHOTOS: GENE ROSS

While three-wheel strollers are all the rage, four-wheel models are far from dead. They may not be as manoeuvrable as three-wheelers, but they have other advantages. They often have a reversible handle, giving you the choice of walking with your baby facing ahead or towards you. And they're usually not quite as wide as three-wheelers, which makes them a bit easier to get through narrow doorways and down supermarket aisles. In this test, the strollers' widths ranged from 48–62 cm; in our last three-wheel stroller test (CHOICE, June 2005) they ranged from 62–74 cm.

HOW WE TESTED

We assessed their ease of use, looking at the following aspects:

What to buy

Models

MACLAREN VOGUE STORM 060333

Price: \$300

GOOD POINTS

- Best for ease of use.
- Two rear pockets.
- Comes with a rain cover and a leg cover.

BAD POINTS

- Handle isn't reversible.

CHILDCARE DISCOVERY 015500-051

Price: \$250

GOOD POINTS

- Reversible handle.
- Brakes on all wheels (front and rear), which is useful when the handle is reversed.
- One rear pocket.
- Comes with a rain cover and a leg cover.

BAD POINTS

- Nothing in particular.

- Adjusting and securing the harness.
- Reclining the seat.
- Adjusting the leg and foot rests.
- Adjusting the handle height and direction.
- Applying and releasing the brakes.
- Locking the swivel wheels.
- Accessing the bottom storage basket.
- Folding and unfolding the stroller.
- Carrying the stroller and loading/unloading it from a car boot.
- Manoeuvring around a course including doorways, stairs, corners, footpaths and rough ground.

We also tested them for safety and durability against the Australian standard.

THE VERDICT

The good news is that none of the tested models failed any durability tests. However, four out of 10 failed at least one safety test, and not all scored well for ease of use. See *What about the rest*, below right.



Swallow
Apollo



Steelcraft Acclaim

filled in rank order.

JEEP GRAND CHEROKEE LIMITED 72117-JQ

Price: \$400

GOOD POINTS

- Two side satchels.
- Music system (amplifier and speakers) built into the handle so you can connect a personal stereo device, such as a CD or MP3 player, allowing you and your child to listen to music while on the move.
- Toy steering wheel on the front tray.

BAD POINTS

- Handle isn't reversible.
- Difficult to reach the strap for adjusting the seatback recline.

LOVE N CARE VICTORY II BP 2850W

Price: \$299

GOOD POINTS

- Reversible handle.
- Brakes on all wheels (front and rear), which is useful when the handle is reversed.
- Two rear pockets.
- Leg cover.

BAD POINTS

- Nothing in particular.

SWALLOW APOLLO

Price: \$200

GOOD POINTS

- Reversible handle.
- Two side satchels and a rear pocket.
- Leg cover.

BAD POINTS

- The seat can be either upright or fully reclined, but not semi-reclined.
- There are no brakes on the front wheels, so it's harder to apply the brakes when the handle is in the reversed position.

STEELCRAFT ACCLAIM 36715

Price: \$299

GOOD POINTS

- Reversible handle.
- Brakes on all wheels (front and rear), which is useful when the handle is reversed.
- Lockable swivel wheels at the back as well as the front, which is also useful when the handle's reversed.
- One rear pocket.
- Leg cover.

BAD POINTS

- Not as easy to manoeuvre over rough ground as the other recommended models.

WHAT ABOUT THE REST?

Safety

- **BABYLOVE**, IGC and **PEG PEREGO**: The foot opening on the seat isn't quite big enough, posing a risk that an unsecured child could slip down and get their head trapped, rather than just slide through.
- **PEG PEREGO**: No effective head barrier to prevent a child slipping out of the head end of the stroller when the seat is fully reclined.
- **BUGABOO**: Risk of the child's fingers getting caught between the handle shaft and the seat side while the handle is being reversed.

Ease of use

- The **BABYLOVE** has a good range of features and good handling over rough ground, but the crotch strap isn't adjustable in length.
- The **PEG PEREGO** has a ledge behind the seat for another child to stand on, which could be handy when you've got an older child as well as a baby.
- The **BUGABOO** and IGC only scored 50% for ease of use, the lowest in the test. This was a particularly disappointing result for the expensive **BUGABOO** (\$1299) — see page 43 for more.

TEST: Layback strollers

Brand / model (in rank order within groups)	1 Ease of use score (%)	2 FEATURES									
		Reversible handle	Adjustable handle height	Rear brakes	Front brakes	Swivel wheels (front / rear)	Front bar or tray	Backrest positions	Legrest positions	Removable hood	Viewing window hood
RECOMMENDED: Passed all our safety and durability tests											
MACLAREN Vogue Storm 060333 (A)	70					Individual	✓ / -	4	Variable	✓	✓
CHILDCARE Discovery 015500-051	65	✓		Linked	Individual	✓ / -	Bar	3	2		✓
JEEP Grand Cherokee Limited 72117-JQ (B)	65		(D)	Individual		✓ / -	Tray	Variable	1		✓
LOVE N CARE Victory II BP 2850W	65	✓		Linked	Individual	✓ / -	Bar	4	5		✓
SWALLOW Apollo (A)	65	✓		Linked		✓ / -	Bar	2	2		✓
STEELCRAFT Acclaim 36715	60	✓		Individual	Individual	✓ / ✓ (F)	Bar	3	8		✓
THE REST: Failed at least one safety test (see What about the rest?, page 41)											
BABYLOVE Collezione Citi BL866	65		✓	Linked		✓ / -	Bar	Variable	2	✓	✓
PEG PEREGO Pliko P3	65		✓	Individual		✓ / -	Bar	4	3	✓	✓
BUGABOO Gecko 62100	50	✓ (C)		Linked (E)		✓ / -		3 (G)	1	✓	
IGC Buzzy Days 316-BD (A)	50	✓	✓	Individual		✓ / -	Bar	3	1		✓

What to look for

- **Weight, size and width.** The lighter the stroller, the easier it is to carry up and down stairs or on buses and trains. As for dimensions, none of the tested models had difficulty fitting through doorways or into a reasonably large car boot.
- **Wheels.** Bigger wheels tend to be better than smaller ones over rough ground, kerbs and stairs. However, they can also be harder to fit into a car boot. **Inflatable tyres** are good at absorbing jolts and bumps, but you'll need to pump them up occasionally. Of the tested models, only the **BUGABOO** has inflatable tyres (on its rear wheels only).
- **Handle.** Check the handle to make sure it feels comfortable to grip. If you're particularly short or tall, you may need a model with adjustable handle height. A **reversible** handle (or seat) is useful if you'd like the option of having your child face you rather than face forward, but check that it's easy to operate.
- **Brakes.** Some strollers have **individual** brakes on each wheel; others have brakes **linked** by a bar, so you only push down on one mechanism to activate them. If the stroller handle is reversible, it's best to have brakes on the front wheels as well, as these will become the rear wheels (nearest your feet) in the reverse configuration.
- **Swivel wheels** at the front make steering easier (but they should also be easy to lock); all the tested models have these. If the stroller has a reversible handle, check whether its rear wheels can also swivel; that will make manoeuvring much easier when you reverse the handle and they're at the front.
- **Harness.** Look for a five-point harness (two shoulder straps attached to the backrest at shoulder level, a waist strap and a crotch strap). The waist strap in particular should be securely linked to the stroller's frame, so the child can't lean out and tilt it. Give the harness a tug to

check the seat doesn't pull away from the frame. Make sure the straps are easy to adjust and the buckles easy to fasten and unfasten (for you, not your child).

■ A layback stroller's **backrest** can be upright or fully reclined (the recommended position for babies under six months and for sleeping toddlers). Most can also be semi-reclined in one or more fixed positions; some have a **variable** adjustment allowing any position.

■ An adjustable **legrest** and **footrest** help accommodate your child's growth, as well as keeping their feet clear of the ground and wheels.

■ A **basket** or **tray** underneath the stroller should be easily accessible in both upright and layback positions, roomy enough to hold a few essentials and deep enough to stop items falling out. Don't overload it or the stroller may become unstable and hard to move.



			SPECIFICATIONS							
Kets hood (sides)	Leg cover	Rain cover*	Maximum weight for child (kg)†	Stroller weight (kg)†	Bottom basket capacity (kg)	Dimensions (H x W x D, cm)	Warranty (years)	Origin	Manufacturer/distributor	Price (\$)*†
✓	✓		25.0	7.4	2.0	108 x 48 x 90	1	China	CO White	300
✓	✓		17.0	12.2	3.0	101 x 53 x 102	1	China	CO White	250
			20.5	8.0	4.5	108 x 52 x 110	1	China	Born with Style	400
✓			17.5	10.1	4.0	102 x 52 x 102	1	China	Love N Care	299
✓			18.0	12.9	5.0	103 x 61 x 99	1	China	Swallow / BabyCo	200
✓			17.0	11.6	4.0	103 x 54 x 98	1	China	Britax	299
	✓		20.0	12.5	5.0	107 x 62 x 105	1	China	BabyLove	439
		ns	8.6	5.0	5.0	106 x 53 x 109	1	Italy	Housewares International	549
	✓		17.0	9.9 / 10.4 (J)	4.0	104 x 60 x 98	2	Taiwan	Worldly Kids	1299
✓			17.0	10.3	5.0	100 x 51 x 107	1	China	IGC	279

* All models with a rain cover can be folded with it still on.

** To the nearest half kilogram.

† Including supplied accessories.

†† Recommended retail, as provided by manufacturers in March 2006.

ns Not stated.

(A) Will have model number, fabric and/or colour changes from May 2006.

(B) To be discontinued by July 2006.

(C) Seat is also reversible.

(D) Limited height adjustment by pivoting the handlebar central grip.

(E) Operated by a hand lever on the handle.

(F) You can stop the front wheels swivelling on all the strollers, but only the Steelcraft also has swivelling rear wheels that can be locked.

(G) The entire seat reclines (backrest and leg support move as one).

(H) No pockets, but it has a tray near the handle.

(J) With seat / with carrycot.

1 Ease of use

See How we tested, page 40, for what was assessed for ease of use.

2 Features

See What to look for, far left, for more on these.

Despite its price (\$1299) the Bugaboo is currently a very popular stroller. It has a versatile design, with a reversible handle and seat and a pram configuration using a supplied 'carrycot' (though in fact it has no handles for using it away from the stroller). Folding and unfolding the stroller takes some effort, and although its rear wheels have inflatable tyres, it doesn't come with a tyre pump. Its small front wheels have trouble with any obstacles like stones on the ground, and the seat recline lever is hard to reach. All in all, it only scored 50% for ease of use as well as failing one of our safety tests — a disappointing result for such an expensive stroller.



Have stroller, will travel?

If you do a lot of travelling with a toddler, a portable lightweight stroller that folds up for easy carrying and storage could be very handy. The QUICKSMART Original Backpack Stroller (selling for around \$90) is a small three-wheel stroller designed to fold up into a supplied backpack. The folded stroller is compact and fairly light, would be easy to carry on a bus or train and would fit easily into an aircraft overhead locker. It passed all our safety and durability tests. Its seat can't be reclined, so it's not suitable for a baby under six months.

However, it scored only 45% for ease of use. You have to follow a specific six-step sequence to fold and unfold it, and some of the locks are hard to release. While you might get used to this with practice, the brakes are very tight and hard to apply and release, and are too close to the floor for easy operation. And tall users may well find the handle too low, making pushing hard on your back.

Standard uncertainty

Two of the strollers that failed safety tests, the BABYLOVE and IGC, claim to comply with the voluntary Australian standard. Of the six that passed all our safety tests, the MACLAREN and JEEP don't claim to comply with it.

Overall, the presence of a claim, including complying with an overseas standard (the BUGABOO claims to comply with the British standard), can't be taken as a completely reliable indication that a product really does meet the requirements. Equally, the lack of one doesn't mean the stroller won't.

In this and previous tests we've even found strollers that failed the standard tests yet had a compliance certification mark (such as the StandardsMark 'five ticks' logo). Certification marks are generally worth looking for, but use the information in this article as well when buying a stroller.



Wheeled suitcases can make travelling much easier
... as long as they last the distance.

LET'S ROLL!

IN A NUTSHELL

- On test: 11 large suitcases with wheels.
- Price isn't necessarily an indicator of quality: one of the recommended models is also one of the cheapest.
- None of the tested models is water-resistant, so you wouldn't want to be caught out in a downpour with one.

Travelling on holiday is one of life's pleasures, but there can be frustrating moments, such as hauling a heavy suitcase around an unfamiliar city or airport. You can end up with tired arms, aching hands and maybe a sore back as well. Not the best way to start your holiday. A suitcase with wheels and an extendable handle (also known as a trolley suitcase) can make that job much easier.

We tested 11 large wheeled suitcases big enough to take a load of around 15 kg, 64–74 cm in height and suitable as checked-in baggage when flying. (The cases themselves weigh 4–6 kg, giving you with 15 kg of contents the usual check-in allowance of 20 kg.) With one exception, they're soft-sided cases with a zippered lid; the **EMINENT E016** is a hard-sided plastic case.

ON THE ROAD

To help you choose a suitcase that's got plenty of room for your belongings, handles easily and is tough enough to last, we put each case through a number of tests.

First, we checked how easy they are to use:

- We packed the cases with 15 kg of clothes and other items, assessing the ease of packing, the internal straps and how easy the zips are to use.
- We assessed the carrying and extendable handles for comfort and clearance.

■ Each loaded case was manoeuvred around a course that included carpet, stairs, doorways, concrete footpaths and asphalt. We noted how easy (or difficult) each model was to manoeuvre and how comfortable it was to use.

After assessing the overall ease of use, we put the loaded cases through several performance tests:

- We checked how easily they can tip over, as a case that refuses to stay upright can be very annoying.
- Each case spent 90 minutes on our rolling-road rig, to see how they stand up to long-term use over bumpy paths.
- Each case was repeatedly lifted and dropped by its lifting handle (not the extendable handle).
- We tested their water resistance by packing them with newspaper and putting them under a heavy shower.
- We tested the external material for puncture resistance.

The outcome? Most of the suitcases are fairly easy to use, with the **CATERPILLAR** clearly topping the list and the **SAMSONITE** equally clearly at the bottom. All of them will let in enough water to wet their contents in heavy rain, and most also had trouble with the fairly severe drop test, which gives an indication of how they'll withstand rough handling. The **ANTLER** came out top in the performance and stability tests.

What to buy

Models are profiled in rank order from top left to bottom.

If you travel often, the **ANTLER** is a good choice, topping the list for stability and durability. If your top priority is ease of use, go for the **CATERPILLAR**. If you don't travel often and don't want to spend too much money, the \$100 **ELITE** is for you. The **ECLIPSE** and **QANTAS** are also good suitcases.

ANTLER ELIPTIQ 0890469

Price: \$229

GOOD POINTS

- Has a strap for attaching other luggage to the case.
- Very stable, both with its stabiliser foot extended and retracted.
- Excellent durability: it wasn't damaged at all in the rolling road and drop tests.
- Good resistance to punctures.

BAD POINTS

- The extendable handle often closes when the case is being pushed forward.
- Lets in water.



CATERPILLAR CAT107/68

Price: \$179

GOOD POINTS

- The easiest to use and manoeuvre.
- Very durable in the rolling road test.
- Still usable after the drop test, though a little damaged.
- Good resistance to punctures.

BAD POINTS

- Slightly unstable.
- Lets in water.



ECLIPSE EC62

Price: \$179

GOOD POINTS

- Has a strap for attaching other luggage to the case.
- No damage in the rolling road test.
- Only minor damage in the drop test.
- Reasonably resistant to punctures.

BAD POINTS

- Doesn't roll as freely as most others.
- Poor stability.
- Lets in water.



ELITE VIVA V61

Price: \$100

GOOD POINTS

- Has a strap for attaching other luggage to the case.
- No damage in the rolling road test.
- Only minor damage in the drop test.
- Good resistance to punctures.

BAD POINTS

- Internal straps aren't the snap-together type and they have to be threaded each time.
- Poor stability unless the foot is extended.
- Lets in water.



QANTAS QF3803 GOLD COAST 61 CM

Price: \$239

GOOD POINTS

- Has a strap for attaching other luggage to the case.
- Excellent durability: it wasn't damaged at all during the rolling road and drop tests.
- Reasonably resistant to punctures.

BAD POINTS

- Very poor stability.
- Lets in water.



WHAT ABOUT THE REST?

All the remaining models also let water in easily, and except for the **SAMSONITE** they performed poorly in the drop test: their handles broke off. This is a tough test, but the best models survived it with minor or no damage. Some models had additional bad points:

- The hard-sided **EMINENT** suffered from badly dented corners on its base during the drop test. Because it's not expandable, it's harder to squeeze a few extra items in when the case is full. It also doesn't roll as freely as most others.
- The **LANZA** and **TRIPLE** have poor stability; their extendable feet make little difference.
- The **TOSCA** has poor resistance to punctures.
- Although the **SAMSONITE** performed very well in the rolling road and drop tests, its performance was otherwise mediocre, and it was the worst for manoeuvring and letting in water. It tips over frequently when being pulled around.

PROFILES: GENE ROSS

Brand / model (in rank order)	PERFORMANCE			4 FEATURES				SPECIFICATIONS		
	1 Overall score (%)	2 Performance score (%)	3 Ease of use score (%)	Expandable	Extendable base	Pockets (external / internal)	Hand grip on wheel base	External dimensions (H x W x D, cm)*	Volume (not expanded / expanded, L)	Weight (kg)
ANTLER Elliptiq 0890469	74	77	70	✓	✓	1 / 2	(A)	73 x 49 x 33	90 / 110	4.1
CATERPILLAR CAT107/68	74	64	83	✓		2 / 2	✓	74 x 56 x 28	90 / 105	5.3
ECLIPSE EC62	71	65	77	✓		0 / 3	✓	67 x 46 x 35	85 / 95	5.3
ELITE Viva V61	70	69	70	✓	✓	2 / 1	(B)	68 x 46 x 29	80 / 95	5.3
QANTAS QF3803 Gold Coast 61 cm	70	63	77	✓		3 / 3	✓	66 x 43 x 29	65 / 75	4.1
PAKLITE Equinox 4403	68	59	77	✓		1 / 2	✓	66 x 45 x 30	70 / 75	4.1
LANZA M18	67	56	77	✓	✓	2 / 2	(B)	72 x 51 x 27	85 / 100	5.3
TRIPLE LITE Denmark DJ-031-24.5	67	60	73	✓	✓	2 / 3	✓	69 x 49 x 27	70 / 80	5.3
EMINENT E016	65	66	63			0 / 1		69 x 48 x 29	70 / na	5.3
TOSCA Airemate TAM1063-8	65	53	77	✓	✓	2 / 4	(B)	69 x 50 x 28	80 / 95	4.1
SAMSONITE Airstop A46	58	58	57	✓		2 / 1		64 x 42 x 29	65 / 75	4.1

ALSO TESTED

We also tested the ATLANTIC Discovery Plus E64, which the manufacturer tells us has since been discontinued due to quality concerns. It performed poorly in our tests and if you come across it in shops we don't recommend buying it.



GENE ROSS



GENE ROSS

Five suitcases suffered broken handles in the drop test. The recommended models survived with little or no damage.

What to look for

- **Light weight.** If you use the suitcase for check-in baggage, the weight of the case counts towards your baggage allowance. The cases in this test weigh 4–6 kg (already around a quarter of the normal 20 kg baggage allowance).
- **Sturdy construction.** Lifting handles that are firmly riveted to the body of the case and don't have weak points like thin cast-metal links are less likely to break.
- **The extendable handle** should be easy to extend and retract, comfortable to grip, and should lock firmly in place when extended. It should be a comfortable height, so the case doesn't bump against your legs as you pull it along. The ANTLER, CATERPILLAR, ECLIPSE, ELITE, LANZA and EMINENT have handles with multiple height settings.
- The case should **roll easily** and not bounce or tip while being pulled along.
- **Expandable** cases can be very handy for those times when you have to squeeze in a few extra items.
- An **extendable base** or foot should improve stability, but check that it does make a difference. The extendable feet on some tested models made little or no difference to stability (see *What about the rest?*, page 45).
- **Internal and external pockets** are very useful. External pockets are especially handy for quick access, but check they can be locked if you want to use them for anything more important than a magazine.
- An **extra handle or grip on the wheel base** to aid lifting.
- **Feet** on both the long and short bases of the case, to prevent it getting scuffed. All the models on test have this.
- **Zips** should open and shut smoothly. The zip tags should be big enough to grip easily and have holes so you can padlock them. A flap over the zip helps keep out the rain.
- **Internal straps** help compress and hold the contents in place. They should be a useful length and have quick-release buckles.
- The case should allow **good access for easy packing**. Cases with a lip around the opening can be a little harder to pack. The wheels and trolley handle take up some of the internal space, so check that the case has the right volume for your needs.
- If you need the case to be **water-resistant**, look for one that's claimed to be specifically designed to be waterproof. Hard-sided cases aren't necessarily more water-resistant than fabric ones, as water can still get through the lid joint. None of the models on test is water-resistant, nor claims to be.

	Warranty (years)**	Manufacturer / distributor	Price (\$)*
in	7	Antler Luggage	229
na	3	Airport Luggage	179
na	5	Premier Luggage	179
na	3	Elite Travel Goods	100
na	10	Courier Luggage	239
na	3	Paklite	219
na	5	Strandbags Group	90
na	5	David Jones	189
na	3	Australian Luggage	170
na	5	Tosca Travelgoods	175
nam	3	Airport Luggage	225

* Not expanded.

** All warranties exclude damage caused by carriers.

† Recommended retail, as advised by manufacturers in February/March 2006.

na Not applicable: can't be expanded.

(A) Not a hand grip as such but moulding on the base could be used.

(B) Not a hand grip as such but the extendable base could be used, which tends not to be as robust or comfortable as a dedicated grip.

1 Overall score

This consists of:

- Performance 50%
- Ease of use 50%

2 Performance score

This consists of the following equally rated aspects:

- Stability.
- Durability on rolling road (simulating long-term use on bumpy paths).
- Durability in lift-and-drop rig.
- Water resistance.
- Puncture resistance.

3 Ease of use score

This consists of the following equally rated aspects:

- Ease of pulling and pushing.
- Handle comfort.
- Ease of packing, including using zips and straps.

4 Features

See *What to look for*, far left, for more on these.

Who's been looking in my bag?

When travelling, you need to securely lock your suitcase to make sure nothing is stolen — or added without your knowledge. But suppose a thief picks the lock, rifles through your bag and then replaces the lock? You mightn't notice anything wrong until you (or Customs) open your luggage.

With this in mind, we looked at some anti-tampering devices. These aren't designed to prevent someone else opening your luggage — you still need to lock your suitcase. Instead, they indicate whether someone else has opened (or tried to open) your case.

■ **PRESTOSEAL Mini Luggage Security Seals:** This small plastic seal clips in place on the zip tags, much like a padlock. It's quite easy to fit and can only be undone by breaking it, thus indicating the case has been tampered with. Price: \$6.95 for a pack of six, available at baggage stores.

■ **PRESTOSEAL Rugged Luggage Security Seals:** This plastic seal also clips in place like a padlock. It has a wire tab and is quite tough, but it's also harder to fit (and undo) than the other seals we tested. Again, to undo it you have to break it, providing evidence of tampering. Price: \$9.95 for a pack of six, available at baggage stores.

■ **TAMPERTELL Easy Seals:** A plastic tie, much like an electrical cable tie, with a coded security number on each tag. It's easy to fit, has a quick-release tab so you can undo it easily, and can't be refitted once it's been opened. The security-numbered tag helps avoid the risk that a thief might undo the tag and replace it with another. Price: \$12.95 for a pack of 20, available at baggage and duty-free stores and travel agencies.

■ **SAFETY BAG:** This is a large plastic bag that you put your suitcase inside, then seal with a plastic tie similar to the TAMPERTELL (it also has a security number on each tag); it has a sticker for recording your personal details. It can be useful on a suitcase that has no zip tags or other holes to attach a seal to. It's easy to use, and can only be undone by

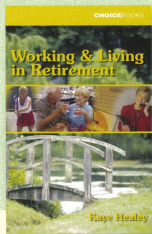


breaking the bag or the plastic tie. Any attempt to open the SAFETY BAG would leave fairly obvious evidence, though a discreet knife slit might be harder to spot immediately. It's sold as a single-trip bag (with one tie and sticker) or a multi-trip bag (one bag, three ties and three stickers). Price: \$9.95 (single) or \$16.95 (multi), available through some baggage stores or online at www.safetybag.com.

None of these devices can guarantee you any legal recourse if your bags are broken into, but they at least give early warning if it's happened.

Since our test, the distributor of TAMPERTELL tells us its tags are now made of nylon, and the SAFETYBAG distributor advised that its plastic ties have been upgraded to incorporate metal teeth in the locking mechanism.

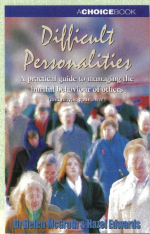
PHOTOS: GENE ROSS



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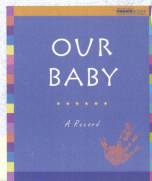
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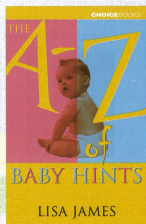


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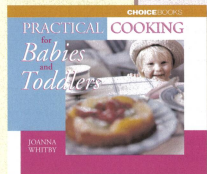


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recalls&bans

Nowadays there are so many product recalls we may not be able to print all of them in CHOICE. For comprehensive recall information go to the Product Recalls Australia website: www.recalls.gov.au. If you don't have web access, call the Product Safety Policy section of the ACCC on (02) 6243 1262.

Companies often rent 1800 numbers for a couple of months after a recall is announced. If the number given is no longer operating, phone the manufacturer or retailer direct.

ALERT: The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission has accepted undertakings from twougg boot companies in relation to incorrect claims about a 100% wool lining on the Human range of ugg boots. Test results indicated that the lining was in fact made up of 99.5% polyester and 0.5% polypropylene. The two companies involved, Rogue Footwear and Pegasus Investments and Holdings, trading as Coastline Agency, have given undertakings not to supply and sell in Australia any footwear product labelled "100% wool lining" and/or "Australian Merino Wool" where to the knowledge of Rogue and Coastline that representation is or may be false. A refund will be offered to any consumer who feels they've been misled. To obtain a refund, contact Coastline Agency on (02) 9531 8245.

FOOD: Coles Supermarkets has recalled Coles Farmland Tropical Muesli, 750 g, APN 9300601006281, all batch codes.

The problem: The product may contain nuts, which aren't declared in the ingredients list.

What to do: If you're allergic or intolerant to nuts, don't eat it. It's safe to eat for those not allergic or intolerant to nuts. If you need to, return it to your local Coles store for a refund, or for more information call 1800 061 562.

PLAYPEN: Associated Retailers has recalled Little Playzone Playpen with Melody Babyroom, sold through Toyworld stores and with the number 8803971073705 on it.

The problem: The animal stickers on the product may be removed and pose a choking risk to young children. **What to do:** Stop using it and remove it from the reach of children. Return it to your nearest Toyworld store for a credit or refund.

TOY: Kmart has recalled **World 4 Kids Toy Melody Phone**, APN 4891622633686, purchased since July 2004.

The problem: It has parts that may break off and pose a choking risk to young children.

What to do: Remove it from the reach of children. Return it to your nearest Kmart store for a refund, or for more information call 1800 634 251.

TOY: Mayvic has recalled **Captain Chopper Large Outdoor Foam Game**, sold in Red Dot stores in WA.

The problem: It's incorrectly labelled and therefore doesn't meet the Australian standard.

What to do: Return it to your nearest Red Dot store for relabelling.

HEATER, FAN, LIGHT: HPM has recalled **HPM Instant Heat 3-in-1** heater, fan and light, models R622/1A and R622/2A, and the standalone heater, model R622/1B, manufactured before early 2004.

The problem: There is a risk of overheating, fire and/or the threat of the heat lamps falling out of some units.

What to do: Stop using the heating lamps, although the light and fan can continue to be used on the R622/1A and R622/2A models. For further information on the next step, call 1300 764 544, Monday to Friday, 9 am–5 pm EST.

DISHWASHER: Hagemeyer Brands is continuing its recall of certain **Omega** and **Smeig** dishwashers. The affected dishwashers were manufactured between November 1998 and May 2003 and have a nine-digit serial number ending in 0, 1, 2, 3, 8 or 9. The recall was first announced in October 2004, so if you have an affected model and have since had it serviced, there's no need for further action.

The problem: A component in the dishwasher may overheat, possibly leading to water, smoke and/or fire damage.

What to do: If you have an affected model and haven't had it serviced since October 2004, note down the model number and serial number,

located on the inside edge of the dishwasher door. To check if your model is affected and arrange for replacement of the faulty component, go to www.omegasmeg.com.au/recall or call 1800 180 347 Monday to Friday, 9 am–5 pm EST for further information.

BATTERIES: Polycom Global has recalled the batteries for the **Soundstation 2** and **Soundstation 2W Expandable wireless conference phones**. They were sold between 1 April 2005 and 31 December 2005 in 12-hour talk time/non-expandable packs, 24-hour talk time/expandable packs and in replacement battery packs.

The problem: The battery may overheat, posing a fire hazard.

What to do: This recall is being run from the US, so go to www.polycom.com/2Wbattery or call 0011 612 253 4506 in the US.

PRESSURE SPRAYER: Mitre 10 has recalled **Buy Right 5 L Pressure Sprayer**, an opaque canister with a black and red pump handle and yellow wand. It was available from Mitre 10, Mitre 10 Handy, Mitre 10 Solutions, Mitre 10 Home & Trade, Mitre 10 Mega, True Value Hardware and some independent stores from 13 December 2005.

The problem: When under pressure the canister may split, causing leakage of the contents.

What to do: Stop using it. Return it to the place of purchase for a refund.

SAUNA BELT: EBS International has recalled **Velform sauna belt**, sold from January to December 2005 through eBay.

The problem: The belt is electrically unsafe and poses a risk of electric shock.

What to do: Stop using it. Return it to EBS International, PO Box 1601, Sunnyside Hills 4109, for a refund.

SWIM VESTS: Brand Direct International has recalled **Mauli Swim Vests**, sold in Big W stores in NSW, Queensland, SA, Victoria and WA between September 2005 and

January 2006, with APN numbers 9327296003746 to 9327296003753. **The problem:** It doesn't indelibly state recommended body mass range and safety warnings.

What to do: Return it to your nearest Big W store for a refund, call (03) 9322 4488 or email info@bigw.com.au.

FAN: Glenfords Administration has recalled **Tornado Air floor or wall-mounted fan**, model FE.FES-50X, sold in the NT, Queensland, SA and WA.

The problem: It doesn't have electrical approval and there's no earthing of the aluminium frame or metal casing of the fan, which could cause an electric shock.

What to do: Stop using it. Return it to the place of purchase for a refund.

LIGHT FITTING: Telbix has recalled **Atol 26/Atol 36 square oyster light fitting**, sold between 16 January 2006 and 10 February 2006, batch/order 1802 or 1818.

The problem: The glass isn't tempered, and may shatter when used.

What to do: Don't install it, or use it if it's been installed. If not installed, return it to the place of purchase for a refund. If it's been installed call (03) 9311 5077 during business hours, or 0409 176 625 after hours for more information.

PLUG PACK: Model Engines has recalled **GV Model plug pack for Hobby Glo plug charger**, part of the ME001 Car Starter Pack and the ME111 Pocket Booster with Charger. The charger has approval number Q042020 and was distributed to toy and hobby shops between 1 April 2005 and 1 February 2006.

The problem: The plug pack charger has a manufacturing fault that poses a risk of electric shock.

What to do: Don't use it. Return it to the place of purchase for a refund, or for more information call 1800 779 389.

DISCO BALL: Eastern Ocean has recalled **GV Multi Rotating Disco Ball**, 32 cm, item code ACC-0616, sold in NSW, Queensland, Victoria and WA. **The problem:** It doesn't meet the Australian standard as live parts are accessible without the use of a tool and may result in a fatal electric shock.

What to do: Return it to the place of purchase for a refund.

aboutchoice

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HOW TO USE THIS INDEX

Bold type indicates a test, survey or trial report, normal type indicates other articles.

* indicates an update of a previous report, additions or corrections to reports, small follow-up items, letters or recalls.

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Did they get Dr Seuss to write this blurb?

We can't make head or tail out of this warranty — except that it seems unlikely anything will ever be free.

DAIRY MILK® Milk Chocolate with Hazelnuts

INGREDIENTS: Milk Chocolate (77%) (Full Cream Milk, Cocoa Butter, Cocoa Solids, Emulsifiers (Soya Lecithin, 475), Flavour, Hazelnuts (23%)), Cocoa Solids, Hazelnuts, Milk Chocolate contains Milk Solids 28%, Cocoa Butter 28%.

Marvellous, magical marketing...

Watch my hands ... look at the first packaging (right and above). Notice its ingredients say 23% hazelnuts? Now look at the second packaging (below right) ... see it says "NOW WITH EVEN MORE HAZELNUTS"? Abracadabra ... now check the ingredients list of the second packaging for the amount of hazelnuts ... dada! 23% — exactly the same as the first one! More hype ... but no extra hazelnuts ... amazing!

DAIRY MILK™ Milk Chocolate with Hazelnuts

INGREDIENTS: Milk Chocolate (77%) (Full Cream Milk, Sugar, Cocoa Butter, Cocoa Solids and Cocoa Solids, Emulsifiers (Soya Lecithin, 475), Flavour, Hazelnuts (23%)), Cocoa Solids, Hazelnuts, Milk Chocolate contains Milk Solids 28%, Cocoa Solids 28%.



DAVID JONES CARD

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There's no other 'interest' like 'interest-free'...

Maybe no interest, but this card charges a \$25 establishment fee for each interest-free option processed to the account. It has no annual fee — but a monthly \$2.95 'account-keeping fee' for interest-free deals. It pays to read the fine print ...



BEFORE



AFTER

What a transformation...



Aussie Grown



Lamb Tandoori Sausages

... BUT ARE THEY ORGANIC?

S Nesbitt wonders what type of tree or shrub these lamb tandoori sausages are grown on.



Talk about the bleeding obvious...

Thank goodness for the instructions. Who'd have worked that out themselves — if you want to eat something cold, don't heat it?

TO HEAT: POOR CHEESE SAUCE & SALSA OVER CHIPS AND MICROWAVE ON HIGH FOR 25 SECONDS.
TO EAT COLD: SAME DIRECTIONS AS ABOVE BUT DO NOT HEAT.

HOW ABOUT A LITTLE HELP?

The prize for the best entry goes to B Skewes (Nachos Instant Meal Pack). Thanks also to G Dean, R Geitl, R McCluskey, N May and S Nesbitt for their contributions to this month's *Hard Word*. Please keep them coming.

If you have any examples you think deserve to be on this page, send them to *The Hard Word*, CHOICE, 57 Carrington Road, Marrickville 2204. Please don't email us your entries — we need the originals.